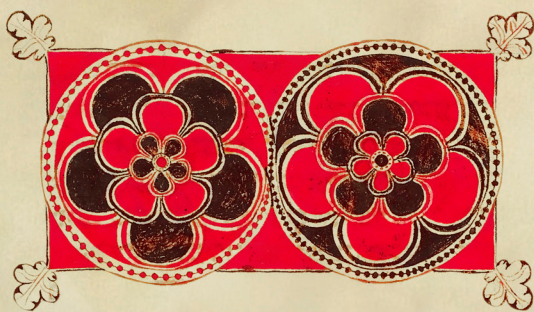
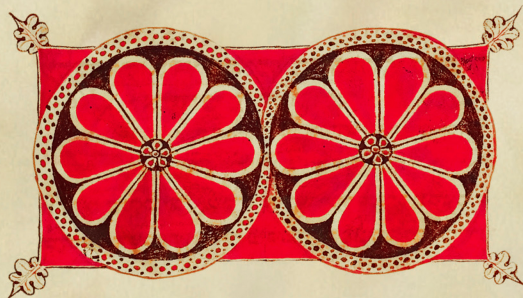




Serving at the 'Banking-Tables'

NEW LIGHT ON ACTS 2-8 AND THE LINK BETWEEN
SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION



DOUGLAS HARRISON-MILLS

BRILL

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*New Light on Acts 2–8 and the Link between
Spiritual and Economic Transformation*

By

Douglas Harrison-Mills



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ASV	American Standard Version
AMPC	Amplified Bible Classic Edition
CEB	Common English Bible
CJB	Complete Jewish Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
DARBY	Darby Translation
DRA	Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition
ERV	Easy-to-Read Version
ESV	English Standard Version
EXB	Expanded Bible
GNV	Geneva Bible (1599)
GW	God's Word Translations
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
KNOX	Knox Bible
MSG	The Message
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLV	New Life Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OJB	Orthodox Jewish Bible
PHILLIPS	J B Phillips New Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
YLT	Young's Literal Translation
WYC	Wycliffe Bible

Acknowledgements

The volume you are holding is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation, entitled “*Hearing about Jesus, but thinking about Joel: exploring the biblical and historical relationship between spiritual and economic transformation*”. The original content remains relatively untouched; however, the title and subtitle have obviously been changed, some new chapters added, and the order rearranged.

I grew up in Australia in an evangelical home (five church services every Sunday, and at least three youth-related meetings during the week) and developed a love of scripture at a young age. However, that love turned into a passion when I went to work in the United States and gained access (as a local resident, not a student) to the magnificent library at Princeton Theological Seminary, and was inspired to publish a monthly newsletter (which in time morphed into an e-pistle) for Christian business people and other lay professionals in different countries around the world. Later, while working in Panama and investigating the parallels between economic systems and biological ecosystems, the staff at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute there provided me with access to biological research that radically changed my theological point of view. Then, when I returned to England, I was encouraged to turn my “theories” into a doctoral dissertation by Dr Peter Holmes, who introduced my non-academic work to Professor Martin Stringer who in turn somehow managed to persuade the University of Birmingham to accept a banker without any theological qualifications for their doctoral programme.

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Douglas Harrison-Mills

October 2022

Introduction: Mistranslations and Missed Opportunities

1.1 One Bible, Two Economic Models?

The Bible of the early church (the Old Testament) is regularly ignored, minimized, slandered, mocked, and rejected by significant portions of the modern ‘evangelical’ movement.

BOOT, 2016:99

The trouble with New Testament Christians is that they’re not Old Testament enough.¹

When I started my research, I had two broad objectives: firstly, to show the link between spiritual and economic transformation (as per the subtitle); and, secondly, to disprove the widely-held belief amongst Christians that the Bible contains two distinctly different economic models: the OT (Hebrew) model of blessing with a “surplus of prosperity”,² and the NT (Christian) model of economic collectivism – whether voluntary or otherwise – with “all things in common”. In other words, I wanted to demonstrate that the separation of OT and NT economic models is an artificial construct. And the most obvious place to start with both investigations is the second chapter of Acts; in particular, Peter’s sermon, when the apostle explained to the assembled crowd (on the original Day of Pentecost; also known as the Feast of Weeks or *Shavuot*) that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was part and parcel of the ancient promises of Yahweh, which also included a contemporaneous outpouring (i.e. restoration) of economic prosperity – as depicted by the literary motif, “grain, oil and new wine”,³ to be found not just in Joel, who the apostle quoted at the beginning of his sermon, but also in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

1 Opening seminar remark by unknown Anglican theologian, Sydney, Australia (1981).

2 Deuteronomy 28:11 (AMPC); also “abundant prosperity” (NIV), “abound in prosperity” (NASB, ESV), “lavish with good things” (MSG), “plenteous in goods” (KJV), and even “make you rich” (EXB).

3 I have used the word “grain” throughout this book, except when quoting directly from MSS, texts or other literary sources that use “corn”. Also, where applicable, I have used “new wine” to replace the rather eccentric “grape juice” employed by the Amplified Bible (Classic Version), which is my primary reference source for scripture quotations.

For example, the “salvation-restoration oracle”⁴ in Joel 1 and 2 depicts the four phases of a spiritual cycle that has economic consequences: backsliding causes Yahweh to progressively remove His blessing, thus creating economic “recession”; disobedience (i.e. deliberate, blatant sin) leads to the total removal of any divine blessing, the outcome of which is “depression”; true, heart-felt repentance causes Yahweh to reinstate His blessing, which kick-starts the process of “recovery”; and increasing levels of obedience lead ultimately to full blessing, which results in “prosperity”. In particular, Joel 2:28 indicates that the outpouring of economic blessing will either precede or occur in close proximity to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, since the apostle Peter made specific reference to this passage at the beginning of his Pentecost sermon, I would suggest that when those devout, God-fearing Jews in the audience were hearing about Jesus they were also thinking about Joel; or, to be more precise, the promises of economic restoration outlined in that book. However, this should not come as any surprise, since ancient peoples often decided questions of obedience and loyalty to a particular deity, especially nature-gods, based on the promises of “divine” provision and protection.

This then raised the question of how to prove that the “primitive church”⁵ in Jerusalem did indeed experience that promised surplus of prosperity, which was resolved in part by an examination of classical Greek literature; specifically, the fourth-century BCE legal orations by Demosthenes and Isokratēs that dealt with banks and bankers. After all, banks are essentially repositories

4 Block (1998:754) uses the term “Salvation/restoration oracles”, but only in his index, to list a number of separate OT prose and poetic salvation and restoration oracle references under a single heading. However, I have chosen to use the collective label “salvation-restoration oracles” in accord with Westermann’s explanation (1991:272) that “The salvation that results from deliverance means first of all the restoration of a whole relationship with God. This, moreover, includes of necessity the restoration of all other areas of life as well”.

5 Luke uses ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*, generally translated as ‘church’) as early as Acts 2:47; also 5:12 and 8:1, 3. Therefore, I have chosen to use the term “primitive church” to depict the original congregation of Jesus-Believers in Jerusalem, as described in Acts 2 to 8. I appreciate that this descriptor has fallen out of favour in recent years; however, the current batch of alternatives are unsatisfactory for the purposes of this study. For example, “Christian community in Jerusalem” (e.g. Kollmann, 2004:63), “early Christian community” (Kollmann, 2004:11–12), “early Christian community in Jerusalem” (Esler, 1987:149), and even the “Christian Jewish community in Jerusalem” (Crossan, 1999:421) are not relevant until after Acts 8, since the appellation “Christian” does not appear until Acts 11:12. Likewise, “apostolic community” (e.g. Cassidy, 1987:29), “Jerusalem community” (e.g. Lüdemann, 1989:61) and “the community of followers of Jesus” (Moxnes, 1993:261) cover too broad a time period. As a consequence, since “primitive church” was for such a long time the most useful way of referring to this specific congregation, in terms of both time and location, I have chosen to retain this older descriptor.

of surplus economic assets. Therefore, attestations of and/or literary references to ancient banks or banking activity provides evidence of economic surplus/prosperity within a particular period and/or community – in a similar way that attestations and/or references concerning say ancient libraries (repositories of books, manuscripts, etc.) would be considered evidence of literacy and learning. The results of this investigation raised the possibility that the traditional translation/interpretation of the NT Greek phrase διακονεῖν τραπέζαις (*diakonein trapezais*) in Acts 6:2, i.e. ‘to serve at tables’, may not be entirely correct since, in the abovementioned literature, *trapeza* has been translated as ‘banking-table’ or simply ‘bank’. If correct, this alternative rendering would mean that the seven Hellenists mentioned in Acts 6:5 (the so-called “Deacons”) were *not* called to manage some sort of charitable work, as traditional exegesis has maintained, but were instead assigned by the apostles to operate some sort of banking facility within the primitive church.

The implications of a banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* were far too important to ignore. Since ancient times, banks and bankers have required a surplus of prosperity in the community they served in order to perform their primary functions: i.e. to receive deposits, provide loans and invest in business ventures. Therefore, if the primitive church required the services of seven experienced *trapezitai* (i.e. merchant-financiers operating as bankers), it could be argued that such a need would only have arisen because the congregation possessed a surplus of prosperity. And, in the minds of a first-century audience of Diaspora Jews, that level of prosperity would have occurred as a result of the outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” alongside the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – as prophesied in Joel, etc. This possible scenario inspired me to take a closer look at other Greek words and phrases in Acts 2 to 8 that had potential commercial connotations but which traditional exegesis had rendered in an exclusively charitable context, such as ἐνδεής (*endeēs*) in Acts 4:34, χρεία (*chreia*) in Acts 4:35 and 6:3, and also κοινωνία (*koinōnia*) – as alluded to by ἅπαντα κοινά (*hapanta koina*) in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 – to name but a few. Furthermore, after years of exposure to traditional scholarly literature extolling the primitive church’s charitable dealings with the so-called poor, I was intrigued, firstly, by the fact that Luke does not use the word πτωχός (*ptōchos*, meaning ‘poor, destitute’) anywhere in the Book of Acts; and, secondly, that the singular English word “poor” does not correspond precisely to the binary economic classification found in Greco-Roman literature.

One of the ideas I considered for the subtitle of the book version of my dissertation was “Mistranslations and missed opportunities”; and, from time to time, I have been asked whether it really matters today (i.e. in the early twenty-first

century) that some ancient scholar made a few mistakes while translating the original Hebrew or Greek texts of the Bible into Latin or English. My response has invariably focused on the second half of the phrase: “missed opportunities”, because I strongly believe that some of these mistranslations have had unintended consequences, resulting in millions of Christians missing out on the sort of “abundant life” that scripture has promised them. For example, if the OT covenant promises that “the people of Yahweh”,⁶ which included the original Christian converts and, as I argue below, continues to include Christians today, will – under certain conditions – be blessed with a surplus of prosperity (alongside the outpouring of the Holy Spirit), we may infer from this that the “outpouring” of material blessing was intended to enable them to evolve from being, say, prosperous merchants to become merchant-bankers (as per Deuteronomy 28:12) – and eventually leverage the potential economic power of banking in order to fulfil Yahweh’s political promise as well: namely, that they would become “the head and not the tail; above and not beneath” (28:13).

But, regrettably, it has been a long time since the global church has experienced that kind of economic evolution (with its political possibilities) – at least, not on the scale that scripture suggests was intended by Yahweh.

1.2 From Pentecost to Persecution

For a long time, Luke’s account of the primitive church has presented problems for scholars grappling with questions such as why strife (some even suggest schism) appeared to enter the community after a period of marked harmony (Acts 6:1), or why the Hellenist-Believers were driven out of Jerusalem while the Hebrew apostles were able to remain (8:1).

Unfortunately, the answers provided by the various exegetical approaches taken to date, ranging from textual criticism to sociological analysis, have not proven wholly satisfactory. In this book, I intend to address these and other questions through an examination of the economic and, where relevant, political dynamics portrayed in the early part of Acts; in particular, the second

6 A study spanning five thousand years of history will invariably encounter problems concerning terminology when attempting to describe a number of different groups in different historical eras. In searching for an adequate descriptor that might encompass all groups, at all times in history, who have worshipped and/or currently worship Yahweh – and therefore qualify as potential beneficiaries of the different covenants between Yahweh and mankind (e.g. ancient Hebrews, Israelites, Jews, including proselytes, Messianic Jews, Gentile Christians both ancient and modern, etc.) – I came to the conclusion that the catch-all phrase “people of Yahweh” was probably the most suitable.

through eighth chapters. From this, I hope to augment our understanding of the Lukan text and simultaneously illustrate the exegetical value of viewing scripture through an economic lens – as well as provide both textual and circumstantial evidence in support of my central argument that the primitive church experienced both the economic *and* spiritual “outpourings” that were promised in the OT salvation-restoration oracles. In doing so, I readily acknowledge that we should beware of looking for the “money angle” behind every phrase, action or circumstance. But then, we should also beware of ignoring the potential benefit of an economic perspective when employed forensically as an exegetical tool.

According to Greek and Roman mythology, money was originally associated with the gods, and was subsequently deposited for safekeeping by all classes of people in the local temple, giving rise to the concept and practice of temple banks. In first-century Jerusalem, the Temple treasury-bank held not only the wealth of the ruling aristocrats, but also the surplus funds of the city’s middle class and numerous traders and craftsmen; and, according to Hamilton (1964:368), there is evidence that temple funds were invested “in a directly commercial sense”. The commercial activity that centred on the Temple cult provided the majority of the city’s annual income, and Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.11.1) informs us that between 10,000 and 18,000 workmen, as well as 1,000 priests, were employed in the rebuilding and expansion of the temple complex,⁷ a hugely expensive project commissioned by Herod the Great that lasted more than eighty years. Consequently, when Jesus disrupted the commercial activity of the κολλυβισταί (*kollybistai*, ‘money-changers’)⁸ and merchants operating within the temple precincts,⁹ this action, more than any theological or doctrinal clash, brought Him into direct conflict with the vested

7 From Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.11.2), we learn that Herod “chose out ten thousand of the most skilful workmen” to build/enlarge the Temple platform, an area the size of 35 acres when finished; however, by the time it was completed, the number working on the project had reputedly grown to around 18,000. In addition, 1,000 priests were trained in carpentry and masonry, amongst other things, to build the Temple itself, because laity were banned from working in the consecrated area: i.e. the *Hakhal* and *Devir*.

8 From κόλυβος (*kólybos*, ‘a small coin’) in Matthew 21:12; also κερματιστάς (*kermatistas*) in John 2:14; from *kerma*, ‘small pieces of money or change, small coin’.

9 In Matthew 21:12 and Mark 11:15, it states that Jesus overturned the “the seats of those who dealt in doves” as well as the “four-footed tables of the money-changers”; however, Luke 19:45–46 does not mention the latter incident. Interestingly, *Mishnah Kerithoth* 1.7 states that the price of doves for sacrifice was sometimes inflated by city profiteers to as much as a hundred times the normal price; consequently, we can easily understand the righteous anger behind Christ’s actions and His tirade that these traders had made the House of God “a den of robbers”.

commercial interests of the powerful, priestly and lay aristocratic families of Jerusalem.¹⁰

As Hamilton (1964:371) writes, “This challenge to the power of the Sanhedrin, especially in the form of interference with the keystone of the Judean economy, could hardly go unnoticed”. However, this single, somewhat symbolic act of protest pales in comparison to the greater threat posed by the possible establishment and operation of a rival banking facility within the primitive church community, which I argue was controlled initially by the Hebrew apostles, but was eventually placed under the day-to-day management of a group of seven Hellenist *trapezitai*, whose leaders were known for their anti-temple sentiment. I also suggest that the fear of this growing economic threat led to an outbreak of persecution in which Stephen, as head *trapezitēs* (‘banker’), was specifically targeted by the Sadducee elite, who either encouraged or perhaps even directly engaged a group of willing Hellenist-Jews to do their dirty work for them. And, unfortunately, Stephen’s alleged blasphemy supplied a convenient religious excuse for what was obviously an economically and/or politically motivated execution.

The flourishing commercial activities of this rival banking operation – as well as its growing power and influence – would have been driven by the not insignificant participation and patronage of thousands of members of the primitive church drawn from the multitude of Diaspora Jews then residing in Jerusalem. And at the centre of this large group of commercially-savvy converts there would have existed a cadre of highly-experienced merchant-financiers or “capitalists”.¹¹ Together, these two groups would have had access to various, interconnected commercial networks that covered most of the then known world;¹² and included politically-important cities like Rome and Susa, as well as Alexandria, a powerful international trade and financial centre.¹³ This is no doubt why the *Hellēnistae* involved in this new economic powerbase became

10 According to Schürer et al (1979:212), “The civil authority of the Great Sanhedrin in the time of Jesus was restricted to the eleven toparchies of Judea proper. It consequently had no judicial authority at all over Jesus whilst he remained in Galilee. He came directly under its jurisdiction only in Judea”.

11 This term is used by Chachi (2005:5) to describe bankers in ancient Babylon; also by Edersheim (1904:27) in a reference to Roman merchant-aristocrats of the equestrian order.

12 According to Gross (1975:13), “The new pervasive Hellenistic civilization greatly encouraged exchanges between the various provinces, including those between the Jews of Palestine and their ever growing Diaspora”.

13 Alexandria was also the second-largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome itself.

a target for persecution by the religious and commercial elite in Jerusalem,¹⁴ with its numerous mercantile and banking interests – which may also explain why the Hebrew apostles were able to remain in the city amidst this patently selective programme of harassment, while the Hellenist *trapezitai* and other Hellenist-Believers had to flee for their lives (Acts 8:1).

Finally, in this investigation I have expanded my research parameters to probe beyond the usual descriptions or compilations of economic and political conditions during the period depicted by the Book of Acts – as per say Jeremias (1969), Schürer et al (1979)¹⁵ and Cassidy (1987) – in order to explore the underlying human dynamics that were often aggravated by what might be regarded as seemingly minor events; and which were manifest within the tensions of ideas both new and old, and the clashes between entrenched groups and idealistic individuals. Because of that, there are times when this approach will appear to provide theories and themes that resemble the plot for a novel or drama. But, as we shall see, when viewed through an economic, as well as a political lens, the Lukan text reveals the basest human motives of greed, corruption, lust for power and even conspiracy to murder.

1.3 The ‘Cross-Discipline’ Approach

People respond to incentives; all the rest is commentary.¹⁶

It is widely accepted that the English word “economics” is derived from the Greek οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*, ‘household management’), a composite of *oikos*, ‘household’, and *némō*, ‘distribute, allocate’. On that basis, the main purpose

14 These *Hellēnistae* (from *Hellēnizo*, ‘to speak Greek’; as opposed to *Hellēn*, ‘a Greek’ by nationality) were Greek-speaking Jews.

15 This 1979 work is customarily called “The New Schürer” or “The Revised Schürer”, being a revision of the original work by Emil Schürer (four editions between 1886 and 1909), which was created under the editorship of Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Matthew Black; also Philip Alexander and Martin Goodman. Therefore, for the purposes of this treatise, and also to recognise the contributions of these later scholars, I have cited and/or referred to these volumes as “Schürer et al”.

16 First argued by Steven Landsburg (1995:3) and cited by Levitt and Dubner (2009:XII–XIII). Generally speaking, incentives are classified according to the different ways in which they motivate people to take a particular course of action. Interestingly, in ancient theocentric communities there was not a clear demarcation between *moral* and *economic* incentives. When people chose to act in a certain way for moral or religious reasons, they were often motivated by the belief that they would be economically “blessed” for doing so (i.e. they would receive material benefit); or, conversely, that they would be “cursed” if they did not.

of this study can be described broadly-speaking as an attempt to improve our understanding of some of the fundamental economic principles to be found in scripture that were ascribed (by the ancients) to Yahweh, and believed to be designed for the management and material benefit of His particular household: i.e. the people of Yahweh down through the ages.¹⁷ Obviously, no investigation involving Yahweh and/or scripture can be totally value-free. Nevertheless, my primary interest here is in economic matters, to the exclusion of many wider theological issues, except where such issues impact economic conditions or results. And so, in a similar way that say computer operating software is based on programming “rules” that need to be adhered to – if an individual wishes merely to use a computer, let alone gain significant benefit from it – I would suggest that scripture also contains ‘rules, principles or laws’¹⁸ that need to be adhered to in order for the people of Yahweh to gain some level of material, economic benefit.

Normally, the approach used in this book would be described as “cross-discipline”; however, in this case, that is a euphemistic way of saying that it falls between two separate academic and ideologically distinct stools: theology and economics.¹⁹ Over the centuries, the differences have created certain tensions; consequently, there are times when the distance between the stools can be considerable. For example, Jackson and Fleischer (2007:1) write that, based on Stark and Bainbridge’s definition (1985:3–8), “religion consists of a set of coherent and shared beliefs, activities and institutions premised upon faith in supernatural forces”.²⁰ On the other hand, Tomes (1985:245) asserts that

17 The question of whether these rules/principles were designed or revealed by a divine being (e.g. Yahweh), or a result of the collective consciousness of humans over centuries of interaction with their natural and/or social environment, is not an issue here, since ancient man believed that adherence to these rules/principles brought some kind of material benefit. On that basis, they are relevant to this study.

18 The Greek *νομος* (*nomos*) means ‘principle, custom or law’.

19 For an instructive and helpful review of the literature dealing with the interaction between religion and economics, I recommend Jackson and Fleischer (2007). Their working paper is part of the Religions and Development Research Programme at the University of Birmingham, an international research partnership launched in 2005 to explore the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction.

20 Spiro (2004:94) states that, from an anthropological viewpoint, religion ought to be defined by its core variable: “the belief in superhuman beings and their power to assist or to harm”, which he states “approaches universal distribution” amongst the academy. Similarly, Epstein (2010:109) explains that “essentially, all the world’s religions were founded on the principle that divine beings or forces can promise a level of justice in a supernatural realm that cannot be perceived in the natural one”.

“economics is fundamentally atheistic”; as a result, “Religious beliefs, practices and behaviour play no role in the life of *Homo Economicus*”.

Nevertheless, history shows that this has not always been the case, as there was a time when biblical texts and commentaries provided the primary reference material used in western economic arguments and/or theory. For instance, Jones (1989:1) explains that The Act Against Usury of 1571 was debated in the English parliament on the grounds of how the Word of God should be applied to the subject; specifically, “how Parliament might best understand and enforce the will of God” (1989:198). Accordingly, most of the arguments presented were sourced from the writings of theological giants such as Aquinas and Calvin. However, just 53 years later, when the legislation was amended in 1624, the Members of Parliament treated usury as a secular issue. God was virtually ignored and, according to Jones (1989:199), “The theocentric, communal, and theologically defined approach to money-lending had been replaced by one that was secular, individualistic, and defined by economic thought”.²¹

As a consequence, economics has been heavily influenced by secularisation theory,²² which Clarke (2007:77) defines as “the belief (in Wilson’s classic formulation)²³ that ‘religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance’ over time as societies modernise”. According to Stark and Bainbridge (1985:429), the term “secularisation” is used to describe “the erosion of belief in the supernatural – a loss of faith in the existence of otherworldly forces”. And Clarke further asserts that the influence of secularisation theory within economics has been evident in two key respects: (a) secular reductionism (“the neglect of religious variables in favour of other sociological attributes, such as class, ethnicity and gender”); and (b) materialistic determinism (“the neglect of non-material, especially religious motivations in explaining individual or institutional behaviour”). Hence, we may speculate that, even before any argument is presented, this treatise faces potential prejudice and thus problems on both sides of this academic divide: firstly, from orthodox economists who, being “fundamentally atheistic”, would be disinclined to explore or even entertain anything of an other-worldly or non-material nature; and, secondly, from theologians who may have ideological problems with concepts that are blatantly designed to promote economic growth and prosperity – especially if there is any suggestion that the prosperity could be divinely inspired.

21 Jones contends that the traditional theological arguments against charging interest on loans were eventually overwhelmed by the pressing need to finance the expansion of Britain’s global mercantile interests.

22 Barro and McCleary (2002:3) assert that the secularisation hypothesis dates back to the 1930s and can be attributed to Max Weber.

23 See Wilson (1992:49).

Jones (1989:174) suggests that, historically-speaking, blame for the separation of religion and economics should be laid primarily at the feet of the Puritans, who argued that certain moral issues, which included usury, should be a matter of individual conscience. Therefore, somewhat perversely perhaps, it was theologians who “cleared the way for the emergence of economics as a science separate from theology”; and, in the process, gave “the governing classes of England a new [secular] way to analyse laws which affected markets, money, and social behaviour”.²⁴ The genesis of modern, secular economics (and the separation from its religious roots) can also be seen in the 1690 treatise, *Political Arithmetick*, by Sir William Petty,²⁵ who explains in his Preface that he chose to “express [himself] in Terms of Number, Weight, or Measure; to use only Arguments of Sense, and to consider only such causes, as have visible Foundations in Nature; leaving those that depend upon mutable Minds, Opinions, Appetites, and Passions of particular Men, to the Considerations of others”. According to Ball (2004:3), Petty believed that the science of political arithmetic “could free a nation’s leaders from man’s irrationality, and be used to fashion sound and verifiable principles of governance”.²⁶

In keeping with Petty’s so-called scientific aims – and also perhaps his aversion to “mutable minds, opinions, appetites, and [human] passions” – modern economists have chosen to rely on computer-driven models based on rational choice theory: the idea that the world is made up of rational people who make rational decisions, albeit for reasons of self-interest.²⁷ However, the global financial crisis that commenced in mid-2007 has shown that self-interest

24 In 1885, Bagehot (2006:7), one of the early editors of *The Economist* magazine, defined economics as “the science of business”.

25 In a 1698 essay by Charles Davenant, entitled *Discourse on the Publick Revenues*, “political arithmetic” is defined as “the art of reasoning with figures, upon things relating to government”.

26 Hancock and Zahawi (2011:133) contend that, “By removing the link to humanity, the economics profession also removed the fundamental link between ethics and economics”.

27 In the latter part of the twentieth century, rational choice theory, also known as rational action theory, became the dominant theoretical paradigm in macroeconomics: e.g. the 1992 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Gary Becker for his work on the rationality of human behaviour. However, according to Hancock and Zahawi (2011:107), research by neuroscientists suggests that perhaps less than 10 per cent of human behaviour could be considered rational. They also argue that modern economics is based on assumptions that have been shown to be “eminently false”. Hence, Rosenau (2006:61–79) recommends that our views of rational choice theory should be revised because traditional economic models have been shown to be poor predictors of economic behaviour. Also, Zaman (2008:11), an Islamic economist, argues that “the [Western] model of ‘rational self-interest’ is not ‘natural’, does not correspond to actual human behaviour, and does not offer any special advantages over other methods for constructing economic models”.

can sometimes drive human economic decisions beyond the boundaries of rationality,²⁸ thus rendering these so-called scientific models “useless”, to quote one of the profession’s luminaries.²⁹ But whether or not the post-2008 financial problems will lead orthodox economists to reconsider their views on “religious beliefs, practices and behaviour” is yet to be shown. On the other hand, that particular crisis has no doubt deepened the pre-existing prejudice of many theologians against any kind of self-regulated or, worse, unregulated free market economic activity, as the possible benefits of capitalism continue to be overshadowed by the harm done by capitalists, both individually and collectively.

Nonetheless, the present ideological distance between theology and economics ignores the fact that, from antiquity, religion has held out the promise of some sort of economic benefit or “blessing”, as we find, for example, in the worship of ancient nature-gods, who supposedly controlled all the natural elements that ensure or impede a successful harvest, amongst other things. In fact, writing about the ancient Aryan pastoralists who lived on the steppes of southern Russia during the third and fourth millennium BCE, Armstrong (2006:6) goes so far as to claim that “the benefits of [their] religion were *purely* material and this-worldly” (emphasis added). Therefore, I would argue that economics is and always has been an integral component of religion and religious life. Consequently, it is possible that any religion whose doctrine does not include the possibility of economic blessing will progressively lose whatever following it originally attracted, as the adherents flock en masse to a better offer.

At the same time, it is also worth noting that secular economic efforts have sometimes failed because of a lack of faith – in perhaps a government, an institution or more likely the people involved; or alternatively, because of people’s lack of faith in their own ability to improve their lot in life. As a result, national economies fail to grow, enterprises fail to attract investors and/or customers, and governments pour huge amounts of economic development funding into

28 I have used the term “2008 global financial crisis” throughout this book because it is generally believed that the crisis commenced when Lehman Brothers filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in September 2008 – even though it was preceded and in part caused by events in June 2007 when, as Ferguson (2008:271–278) reminds us, a hedge fund owned by Bear Stearns (that was heavily exposed to sub-prime mortgages) was wound up, creating serious problems throughout the banking and insurance industry.

29 In 2009, Paul Krugman, winner of the 2008 Nobel prize for economics, admitted that much of the previous 30 years of macroeconomics was “spectacularly useless at best, and positively harmful at worst”, while Barry Eichengreen, a prominent American economic historian, has claimed that the 2008 global financial crisis “cast into doubt much of what we thought we knew about economics” (See “What went wrong with economics?” in *The Economist* magazine, July 16th 2009).

poverty-stricken areas with minimal effect. Finally, the segregation of economics and religion also discounts the fact that banking originated in temples, for which we have attested evidence dating as far back as 3400 BCE.³⁰ And since theologians appear to have ignored this and other aspects of economic history, or at least failed to take them into account in their study and interpretation of the biblical text, it should come as no surprise that orthodox economists have chosen in return to ignore scripture and other religious factors in their attempts to solve the economic problems of the world.

In other words, both sides have decided that the other is simply not relevant to their work, which is a ludicrous notion, given their linked origins and shared past.

1.4 Applying a ‘What-if Scenario’ to the Biblical Text

Any difference in approach and/or style exhibited by this book – when compared to traditional theological discourse – stems primarily from my previous professional career: more than 20 years working as an investment banker.

As a result, it was inevitable that my interest would be drawn to sections of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant dealing with economic matters, especially those promising a surplus of prosperity since, as mentioned previously, exploiting and maximising economic surplus has been the primary function of banks and bankers for millennia. In fact, it is possible that the Deuteronomists may have been alluding to some ancient form of commodity-banking activity in Deuteronomy 28:8, which contains a promise that the Lord will “command” (Hebrew: צִוָּה, *ṣāḇā*, ‘cause to exist’) a blessing upon the people of Yahweh in their barns and storehouses. These storage facilities usually housed the surplus grain from abundant (i.e. blessed) harvests; and, in the pre-coinage era, when payments were made in kind,³¹ substantial profits could be made from the

30 The Temple of Uruk at Eridu; as mentioned in Chachi (2005:4, 21) and Davies (2002:50).

31 Interestingly, the Greek word *drachma* and Hebrew word *shekel* predate the era of coinage, and were used originally in commerce to denote a measure of weight. According to Davies (2002:74), the literal meaning of *drachma* was a ‘handful’, from *drássomai*, ‘to grasp’. However, the precise weight (of grain) represented by this term varied considerably: e.g. from less than 3 grams in Corinth to more than 6 grams in Aegina. Likewise, Temin (2003:10) advises that, initially, *shekel* (from the root, *shaqal*, ‘to weigh’) also described a unit of weight – of barley, originally, but subsequently silver – “and it was the weight of silver that determined the value of a transaction”.

possession of surplus grain – not only through grain trading,³² but also from a range of deposit and loan activities normally associated with banking.

Also, my professional work often included the use of financial modelling techniques that required me to run “what-if scenarios” with the data I was reviewing: e.g. What if interest rates rose 1 per cent? What effect would that have on corporate profits? The proven usefulness of these exercises inspired the idea of applying a number of what-if scenarios to the text of Acts 2 to 8, which have given rise to various arguments presented in this treatise: e.g. What if the Greek phrase *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 was re-interpreted, using the alternative and explicitly commercial translation of *trapeza*: i.e. ‘bank’? This, as mentioned previously, would mean that the seven Hellenists listed in Acts 6:5 were not called to be “deacons”, but were chosen instead to ‘serve in the bank’ (literally, ‘to serve at the banking-tables’),³³ and were thus operating as *trapezitai*: bankers or merchant-financiers within the primitive church community.

However, I hasten to add that this suggestion is not based on linguistic arguments alone, since religious sects had been operating temple-banking facilities for something like three millennia prior to Pentecost.³⁴ Therefore, it is highly likely that the new sect of Jesus-Believers³⁵ would choose to continue

32 Temin (2003:8) states that “there is abundant evidence for trade in bulk commodities even before the invention of coinage”.

33 According to Hamilton (1966:365), “Because of the confusion of uncoordinated local coinage the earliest bankers were money-changers who sat at their tables (*trapezai*). From these tables the banker got his name (*trapezitēs*) in the same way the English ‘bank’ derives from *banque* or *banca* in the sense of bench, table, or counter”. Bogaert (1966, in Seager, 1967:379) explains that money-changers “had the material resources for safe-keeping of deposits and their profession, as Isocrates testifies, inspired confidence. The practice of paying specific debts through a changer gave rise to the depositing of sums destined for the payment of debts as yet uncontracted. As deposits accumulated, the changer began to risk short-term loans, originally at the client’s request, and so became a banker”.

34 See Orsingher (1967:1), cited in Chapter 4.3, *Mesopotamian-Babylonian temple banking*.

35 Acts 2 to 8 describes in some detail the tension between the temple authorities and the primitive church, whose members (for the first three or so years after Pentecost) are all Jewish or at least Jewish proselytes. Thus, ‘sect’, from the Greek αἵρεσις (*hairesis*, which Thayer defines as “a body of men separating themselves from others and following their own tenets”) is an appropriate descriptor for the new congregation. According to Fitzgerald (2013:138), the use of *hairesis* was “fundamentally descriptive and neutral as a category, not pejorative. It was not the term itself but rather the outsider’s evaluation of Christianity that determined whether the depiction was positive or negative”. Hence, as Thayer explains, when it is used in Acts 24:5 & 14, there is “a suggestion of reproach”. Also, in Acts 4:32 the primitive church congregation is described as *plēthous tōn pisteusantōn*, ‘the company of *believers*’ (emphasis added) – from *pisteuō*, ‘to believe’.

the tradition. Moreover, because the treasury-bank in the temple at Jerusalem was at that time controlled by the corrupt Jewish elite, it is also likely that the members of the primitive church congregation – many of whom were pious (and affluent) merchants from “all the countries where there were Jews”, according to F. F. Bruce – would have wanted to establish their own, ethical banking operation. As a consequence, any defection of substantial “business” from the temple to the sect would have created a great deal of tension, which in this instance led to a level of persecution (e.g. the martyrdom/murder of Stephen, the head *trapezitēs* at the rival bank) that we would not normally expect to occur solely in response to a new sect preaching a new doctrine: cf. Acts 5:27–40, when the apostles are arraigned before the Sanhedrin; specifically, the argument made by Gamaliel (vv. 38–40) concerning an appropriate response to the new doctrine being preached by Peter and the other apostles. And all this makes a banking interpretation for *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 eminently plausible, as I argue below in some detail.

Furthermore, the application of this particular what-if scenario to the text of Acts 6:2 has led to further speculation. For example, if the primitive church did have its own banking operation, which was at one time controlled by Hellenist *trapezitai*, we are not only obliged to re-evaluate the motivation behind the murder of Stephen, but also the role and status of perhaps the most important Hellenist-capitalist within the community: Joseph-Barnabas. What’s more, the exercise of viewing scripture through the lens of economics has provided potential solutions to a range of long-standing problems concerning interpretation of the Lukan text. Nevertheless, I am aware that theologians on the whole are rarely comfortable dealing with economic matters, as demonstrated by centuries of theological tradition and writing on money and wealth creation that can generally be categorised in the negative.

As mentioned previously, when Jesus overturned the tables of the money-changers He was not protesting against the role of *trapezitai* per se since, as Hamilton (1966:372) reminds us, they were at that time providing a necessary service for festal pilgrims.³⁶ Of particular interest, in Luke’s account of the temple-cleansing incident (Luke 19:45–46), the reference (in Matthew 21:12–13 and Mark 11:15–17) to Christ overthrowing the money-changers’ tables is omitted, from which we may infer that, as far as Luke was concerned, Jesus may not have been attempting to abolish this essential component of the

36 Armstrong (1997:143) agrees that, “When he drove out the money changers and pigeon-sellers, Jesus was not protesting against the commercial abuse of sacred space. Such vendors were essential to the running of any temple in late antiquity and would have occasioned no outrage”.

temple economy or ban its agents from operating within the temple precincts. Therefore, I would suggest that Christ's protest (whether against the merchants and money-changers or the merchants alone) was directed more specifically towards the corruption of those roles by the materialistic Sadducees who controlled the numerous commercial activities relating to the Temple and its cult, including the Temple treasury-bank. Sadly, tradition seems to have taken Christ's actions out of context and consequently devalued the potential leadership role of *trapezitai* within the national and/or global church community. This has produced negative consequences at both the individual and organisational level: firstly, denying those who might feel called to occupy this important, ancient "liturgical" role their legitimate position and function within the temple that, according to the apostle Peter, is made of "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5); and, secondly, consigning the Christian church to an ignominious history of corporate begging and significantly underpaid workers.

Moreover, much of the global Christian community is currently living below the poverty line, and around 200 million of them are experiencing persecution for their faith, which makes a mockery of the promises in Deuteronomy that "there will be no poor among you" (15:4), and also that "the Lord shall make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath" (28:13). For that reason, I have attempted in this book to address these and other discrepancies between the biblical promises and the human experience. To that end, this exploration of the relationship between spiritual and economic transformation is weighted much more heavily on the economic side, and deliberately so, simply because (a) that is where my expertise lies; and (b) the subject of spiritual transformation is dealt with copiously within the existing body of theological literature, whereas economic transformation is not. Also, the physical constraints of a single volume mean that, in the examination of a complex and wide-ranging subject of this nature, which spans more than five thousand years of history, some topics and/or arguments will be explored in depth, while others will be touched on lightly and perhaps only in passing.³⁷

37 For example, my focus on an overtly commercial interpretation of key passages in Luke's text means that the *non-commercial* economic activities (or what Hock refers to as "the nonmonetary exchange of value") within the primitive church community fall outside the scope of this book. Hock (2005:22) explains – and I am fully in agreement with the idea – that "the essence of community, its very heart and soul, is the nonmonetary exchange of value. The things we do and the things we share because we care for others". However, in the spirit of Adam Smith, he goes on to argue (2005:26–27; 152–153) that "The nonmonetary exchange of value does not arise solely from altruistic motives. It arises from a deep,

One of the goals of this volume is to motivate readers to challenge and/or re-evaluate the traditional NT exegetical approach that has promulgated over-spiritualised or charity-only interpretations of segments of the Lukan text. However, it would be naïve to believe that the arguments can be advanced and/or won on the basis of exegesis alone. Therefore, I have provided support for the linguistic argument from a number of other, seemingly disparate sources, such as secular economics (i.e. a mix of orthodox, behavioural and development economics), modern and ancient economic and political history, and even news reports and editorials from the modern media.³⁸ Thus, in an attempt to convince readers that my arguments have merit, I have integrated various factors into “my overall economic picture as if in a mosaic” (to quote one of my reviewers), which is why the structure of this book might not be quite as “neat” as one might expect.

Obviously, there are numerous questions to be addressed in order to determine if an outpouring of material prosperity is meant to occur in tandem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: for example, whether secular economic research findings support the biblical notion concerning the correlation between moral and economic conditions, which I have been able to answer in the affirmative. Also, whether the economic component of the dual-purpose “outpouring” was meant solely to help finance the birth of the Christian church, or whether it was meant to be experienced by subsequent generations of Christians. To address that particular question, Appendix 3 offers the results of a simple but illuminating survey that compares the dates of episodes of “revival” against economic cycles dating from 1782 to 1973. Put together, these and other chapters suggest that the “salvation-restoration” oracles found in Jeremiah, Joel and Ezekiel could and therefore should be considered relevant in the modern era.

Finally, any argument in support of a link between spiritual and economic transformation is in danger of being dismissed arbitrarily as an attempt to legitimise the much-maligned, so-called prosperity gospel. Also, any exegetical exercise that deals with the early chapters of Acts will be expected to address the controversy over the “overall value [of Acts] as a historical source”, as Rothschild (2004:25) describes it, which she states is one of a number of issues involving the Book of Acts and its author that “present scholarship still seeks

intuitive understanding that self-interest is inseparably connected with community interest; that the individual good is inseparable from the good of the whole”.

38 Drawing upon media archives is a legitimate approach in this particular instance because the media output of the modern era has been and will continue to be a valuable resource for historians and other academics, both in the present and in the future.

to resolve” – despite more than 150 years of vigorous debate. Both these issues have been addressed in this volume.³⁹ In addition, I have used my professional experience (as well as my theological knowledge) to explore some root causes of the 2008 global financial crisis and 2012 banking scandals; specifically, the impact of “the love of money”, which I came into contact with on a regular basis – looking at it also from a behavioural economics point of view, as well as drawing on some interesting work from the disciplines of psychiatry and neuroscience, in order to highlight how deeply-embedded this problem is in society in general, and in the global banking world in particular.⁴⁰

All of which raises an important question: should the ancient ‘liturgical’ role of priest-banker be reinstated within the church today?

1.5 A New Exegetical Methodology without a Label

Obviously, economics per se is not a new topic in theological circles. As mentioned previously, over the first 1,500 years or so of church history, the main economic issue addressed by theologians was the age-old controversy surrounding usury, which was tackled as early as the fourth century CE, during the Council of Nicaea,⁴¹ then most notably by Aquinas in the thirteenth century; and in later centuries by Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, economics has also been the focus of books by biblical scholars such as Alfred Edersheim (1904), Emil Schürer (1909) and, more recently, Joachim Jeremias (1969), Martin Hengel (1974), Douglas Oakman (1986; plus his 1998 joint venture with K. C. Hansen) and Richard Cassidy (1987), to name just a few.⁴² However, these particular

39 See Chapter 15, *The modern prosperity gospel: theology and social context in conflict*; and Appendix A2, *Luke: historian or theologian?*

40 See Chapter 16, *The love of money: a global banking perspective*.

41 The first church law dealing with usury (Canon 17) prohibited money-lending amongst the clergy (which no doubt would have sabotaged any possibility of an ongoing role for priest-bankers in the church), and was introduced at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. Then later, in 1179 CE, an edict issued by the Third Lateran Council declared that any Christian who practiced usury faced excommunication.

42 In addition, we note the efforts of Thomas Carney (1975), Peter Oakes (2004) and Bruce Longenecker (2010), along with some secular economic historians whose work provides helpful information on the period under review, such as Raymond Bogaert (1966), John Rich and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1991), Jean Andreau (1999), Peter Temin (2001–2003) and also Dominic Rathbone (2007), amongst others. Collectively, economic historians tend to fall into two camps: on one side, the “primitivists”, represented by say K. Bücher (1901) and Moses Finley (1973), who believe that nothing approaching market or rational

efforts could be described as a compilation of historical economic facts that provide a description of the economic conditions behind the biblical text; and while eminently worthwhile, I would argue that this kind of treatment does not go far enough. Put simply, there is a need to move beyond the use of economic facts as historical background (e.g. to help explain the social setting of the text), to the point where an economic perspective (i.e. viewing the biblical text through the lens of economics) becomes a legitimate exegetical tool in its own right.

Granted, there are areas of study that already combine religion and economics; for instance, "Religious Economics" (also referred to as "Christian Economics"), which provides a platform for critiquing secular economic theory and/or practice by judging it against the criteria of religion-based ethics: e.g. those drawn from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Consequently, its main purpose is to act as an intellectual framework and catalyst for reform of any ethically-unacceptable activities of existing, predominantly secular institutions of an economic or political nature.⁴³ Also, the "Economics of Religion", which is the application of orthodox economic research techniques and modelling to the study of religious groups or activities, as per Finke et al (1996) or Iannaccone (1998): i.e. the view of religion as a marketplace, whose so-called faith groupings (e.g. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hindu, Buddhism, etc.) represent various niche markets, each with their own sub-niches (e.g. Protestant, Catholic, Pentecostal, etc.). In this context, religion is stripped of its other-worldliness and treated as one of human society's many pursuits, whose participants engage in a range of economic activities that may or may not be peculiar to their particular affinity group, and which can be measured and analysed for the purposes of secular economic study.

Nevertheless, while I readily accept the validity of both these fields of study, neither is capable of providing a suitable intellectual home for the approach involved in my work. Essentially, Religious/Christian Economics is

capitalism can be seen in antiquity; and on the other, the "modernists", such as Michael Rostovtzeff (1926), Tenney Frank (1927) and Karl Polanyi (1968, 1979), who find numerous similarities between economic life in say the Roman Empire and today (as mentioned in Meggitt, 1998:42). Notably, Polanyi (1979:39) argues that the ancient form of economy is comparable to the modern version in terms of "a regulated process of cooperative effort between people and their surroundings that produces an ongoing provision of material means for the purpose of satisfying needs".

- 43 Jackson and Fleischer (2007:3) describe Religious/Christian economics as "encompassing views from the church on aspects of capitalism, including usury, and frequently containing wide ranging critiques of capitalism, the market, socialism, income distribution, banks, interest and taxation". They cite Beed and Beed (1996), Gill (1994, 1998 and 2004); also Hay and Kreider (2001).

more concerned with ethics than it is with economics; and the Economics of Religion is more concerned with secular economics than it is with religion. Also, theoretically speaking, you could function within either discipline without the need to make reference to scripture; whereas, if one is to interpret scripture through an economic lens, this is obviously impossible. Interestingly, when I was conducting research for my dissertation, it was suggested that I might need to create a label for this hybrid field of study, which I initially called “Biblical Economics”. However, I quickly discarded that phrase when I found that it had been used and also abused in Christian media and on the internet. As a result, this nascent exegetical methodology is currently without a label, or even a workable definition.

Nevertheless, given that this new approach uses an economic perspective as an exegetical tool (i.e. a method of interpreting scripture), it is therefore situated firmly within the discipline of Biblical Studies, which means that, unlike orthodox economics, this new hybrid methodology embraces the “supernatural” (i.e. non-material and other-worldly concepts and/or issues) with unabashed enthusiasm.⁴⁴ Also, if there are lessons to be learned from the exploration of biblical economic principles and/or practices (and I believe there are), then the real-life economic problems that currently plague the global Judeo-Christian community have created a moral obligation to move beyond mere intellectual exercises to devise practical stratagems and applications that will hopefully lead to solutions to these problems. Consequently, this nascent field of study also qualifies as an important, but thus far unexploited component of Practical Theology.⁴⁵

On the other hand, orthodox economists prefer to deal with factors that are measurable, which is one reason why seventeenth-century “political

44 *The Oxford Dictionary* defines “supernatural” as “a manifestation or event attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature”. Ancient communities were generally theocentric and so readily accepted the supernatural – usually depicted as “acts of God” – as part and parcel of their life and their literature. The latter occurrences usually took the form of “divine intervention” or “divine causation”; for example, Herodotus’ report of the Greco-Persian wars (*Histories* 7.137.2) actually contains the phrase “divine act”. And, according to Rothschild (2004:9), divine causation is used by ancient historians “to describe events for which natural explanations fall short in terms of either plausibility, or capturing an event’s ‘truth’ or significance, or both”.

45 *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines “practical theology” as “the study of the institutional activities of religion” – an overly-narrow definition that permits theologians to abdicate any responsibility to “get their hands dirty” with real problems in the real world. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I would prefer to describe/treat Practical Theology as “the practical application of theology to everyday life”, which obviously includes the economic component of people’s lives.

arithmetick” evolved into the modern study of statistics. However, in his discussion of “the poor” in scripture, Oakes (2004:368) cautions that, while most economic studies are based on analysing (measurable) resources, “ancient sources (and certainly the New Testament) never tell us the resources of a particular poor person or group. They tell us *behaviour*. X wears no cloak. Y sells himself into slavery. Z works as a prostitute. We cannot map this *behaviour* directly onto resources” (emphasis added). Consequently, the field of secular economics that is most relevant to the kind of exegetical approach used in this study is Behavioural Economics, which is described as “a method of economic analysis that applies psychological insights into human behaviour [i.e. the effects of social, cognitive and emotional factors] to explain economic decision-making”.⁴⁶ Thus, even though this new approach represents first and foremost an exegetical tool that has the ability to expand our understanding of the biblical text, it may also provide benefits and assistance for researchers working in the secular field of Behavioural Economics, which incorporates Behavioural Finance.⁴⁷ Also, since there has recently been a lot of interest shown by International Finance Institutions (IFIs)⁴⁸ concerning the use of Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) to help solve some of the problems of aid distribution in less developed/low income countries, this nascent field of study also offers a way of enhancing the efforts of both academics and professionals operating in the field of Development Economics.⁴⁹

But does biblical exegesis need yet another interpretative methodology? At the turn of the twentieth century, Frederick William Farrar (1901:145) wrote that “The history of exegesis is, in a great measure, the history of errors”. However, it would perhaps be more accurate (and also kinder) to say that it has been – and

46 Expanded definition of “behavioural economics” from *The Oxford Dictionary*. The association with psychology gives the impression of it being a modern academic discipline. However, its first appearance occurred in the late eighteenth century, during the so-called “classical” period of economics; and its pioneers include Adam Smith (in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which offered psychological explanations for individual behaviour) and Jeremy Bentham, who wrote extensively on the psychological underpinnings of “utility”. Later contributions to this field were made by Frances Edgeworth, Vilfredo Pareto and Irving Fisher.

47 Since *oikonomia* can be interpreted as ‘household management’ in its wider sense, this new exegetical methodology also encompasses areas other than those of a purely financial nature, such as organisational management paradigms and numerous human resources issues; however, these fall outside the scope of this particular study.

48 Such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UK Department for International Development (DfID).

49 Especially since the majority of people living (and trying to make a living) in less developed/lower income countries have not yet succumbed fully to the insidious process of secularisation.

continues to be – a history of trial and error. Because of that, no theologian (or theological approach) would claim to have all the answers to the problems of interpreting scripture. But then, the more questions we ask, the more answers we will discover; particularly if we ask different questions, which are usually generated by utilising a different approach, or at least a different perspective.

Now, a key (exegetical) error that this nascent field of study attempts to redress is not one of commission but omission; i.e. omitting to take into account the economic expectations of the Jewish people (in Jerusalem in 33 CE, in particular) that were formed by religious beliefs and traditions dating back more than five centuries. Because of this omission, biblical scholars have failed, collectively-speaking, to explore the importance of the economic context of Peter's reference to Joel in his Pentecost sermon and the potential impact it would have had on his audience; as well as the ramifications of alternative, specialised economic or commercial meanings of certain Greek words, phrases and/or concepts in the Lukan text. Furthermore, a similar failure to appreciate the complexity of economic life in ancient societies has caused various exegetes to make assumptions that the economic activities of the primitive church were crude, and thus rather simple: e.g. a first-century "soup kitchen".⁵⁰ Finally, these and similar assumptions have led to unsatisfactory solutions to perceived problems with the text, which in turn has given rise to various criticisms of Luke's account of events, such as the suggestion that some of his claims are "implausible".⁵¹

My interest in the connection between religion (in particular, the Judeo-Christian tradition) and economics stems in part from a meeting some time ago with the late Dr Johann Millendorfer, a highly regarded Austrian economist

50 The phrase "soup kitchen" is used by Johnson and Harrington (1992:106) to describe the 'daily distribution' mentioned in Acts 6:1.

51 For example, by ignoring the economic context of Peter's Pentecost sermon (as implied by his reference to Joel), we are forced to judge Luke's account of events on the basis that spiritual or religious reasons, and these alone, motivated "3,000 souls" to repent and be baptised after hearing a short sermon; an outcome that has been criticised as "implausible" (e.g. Rothschild, 2004:277). However, by exploring the possible economic motivation/s involved (namely, the fact that this event is likely to have occurred during an empire-wide economic crisis, in a city where the ruling elite and central bank were reputedly corrupt, as discussed elsewhere), Luke's numbers in fact begin to look more and more plausible. This argument does not in any way disparage the potent emotive forces generated by any spiritual/religious expectations amongst Jews at that time concerning, for example, the advent of the Messiah and messianic age, which Peter's sermon explicitly tapped into. Nevertheless, the combination of both spiritual *and* economic expectations (held by a significant number of the residents of Jerusalem at the time) would have provided more than enough motivation to elicit the level of response reported by Luke in Acts 2:41 and beyond.

and also a devout Christian. I do not believe that he ever used the label “Biblical Economics” or any other phrase with religious connotations, which is understandable, since he worked as an economic consultant on behalf of a client list that consisted predominantly of corporations and government agencies, but chose instead to coin a more secular phrase: “The Humane-Economic Principle”. In different papers in which he, along with colleagues from the STUDIA group, examined the socio-psychological causes behind different economic conditions,⁵² Millendorfer wrote (e.g. 1985:144) that, “The disturbance of [economic] equilibrium [...] is characterized by an overemphasis of things, compared with the importance of man”. His findings also showed that problems arise when “high economic systems performance” (i.e. economic prosperity) leads eventually to “the dominance of the economic system over the human realm”, which echoes Christ’s remark, in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13, about humans being “in the service” (δουλεύω, *douleuō*; literally, ‘to be a slave’) of mammon.

Unfortunately, scripture, economic history and also modern psychiatric and neuroscience studies show that human nature is such that, collectively, humans do not possess the moral fortitude and mental discipline necessary to resist these powerful and potentially dominating forces. Therefore, in order to seek a solution to this and related problems, we are left with no alternative but to look beyond the human experience and explore what the prophet Isaiah described as “higher thoughts” and “higher ways” (Isaiah 55:9): e.g. the kind of macroeconomic principles-cum-rules that form a timeless strategy of provision for Yahweh’s *oikos*, which today consists of billions of people and conducts its affairs on a global scale. In this way, the style of economics involved in this new exegetical methodology could also be described as encompassing a form of normative economics: advocating what *ought* to be.

Finally, there is the question of where this nascent exegetical methodology might fit within the wider study of wealth ethics. Put simply, most of the writing in this area deals with the far-reaching subject of “the proper use of wealth”. In the main, these works consist of various arguments that existing wealth should be “redistributed” to the *ptōchoi* or *indigentes* of the world in the form of charitable giving,⁵³ which various economic studies have shown to

52 Studiengruppe für Internationale Analysen (STUDIA) is an Austrian research group founded by Johann Millendorfer that has become known for economic research that combines analysis of both “soft” (socio-psychological) and “hard” (data-driven) factors.

53 Those interested in recent works on wealth ethics, and Lukan wealth ethics in particular, might like to consider David Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor* (2022), Rachel Coleman, *The Lukan lens on wealth and possessions* (2020), Reuben Bredenhof, *Failure and prospect: Lazarus and the rich man* (2020), Kaja Wiczorek, “Economic Conditions Impacting Luke’s

be a less effective solution for poverty reduction when compared to the creation of conditions of economic growth in which the income of both rich and poor rise together.⁵⁴ Therefore, since I have always been a staunch advocate of the “growth” argument, this new exegetical approach tends to focus on those passages in scripture that either depict or allude to the mechanics of wealth creation; specifically, scriptures that explain or describe how wealth should be put to use *in order to create wealth for others*. Nevertheless, as you will read, it is a form of wealth creation based on a set of stringent ethical conditions that are set out in the Mosaic-Sinai covenant.⁵⁵ Also, since many of the arguments in this book promote the idea of a “divine” or divinely-inspired link between spiritual and economic renewal, it is obvious that such a link will only exist under circumstances in which spiritual transformation has occurred in an authentic and demonstrable way in people’s lives. This means that, wherever wealth creation is discussed in this treatise, ethical behaviour in all its forms is implicit, and therefore can be taken for granted – unless otherwise stated.⁵⁶

1.6 A Discussion of the Historical Source Material

Obviously, I could not move beyond the use of economic facts as historical background (as mentioned above) without actually relying on the work of the historians concerned. As a consequence, it would be helpful to discuss the merits and/or failings of some of these sources.

For example, I found Schürer et al (1979) and Jeremias (1969) particularly helpful; specifically, their comprehensive description/compilation of the economic conditions in Judea at the time under review, and especially the latter scholar’s explanation of the commercial activity that centred on the Temple

Concept of Economic Solidarity” (2018), Christopher Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics* (2010), Nils Neumann, *Armut und Reichtum im Lukasevangelium* (2010), Hans-Georg Gradl, *Zwischen Arm und Reich* (2005), Herbert Stettberger, “Nichts haben – alles geben?” (2005), Kiyoshi Mineshige, *Besitzverzicht und Almosen bei Lukas* (2003), Vincenzo Petracca, *Gott oder das Geld* (2003) and René Krüger, *Gott oder Mammon?* (1997). However, as mentioned above, all of these scholars have focused almost exclusively on the redistribution of wealth in the form of charitable giving or sharing of possessions.

54 In Easterly’s words (2002:14), “on average, growth has been more of a lifesaver to the poor than redistribution”; to which Hancock & Zahawi (2011:217) agree.

55 According to Armstrong (1997:88), the “613 *mitzvot* that constitute the Mosaic-Sinai law [...] address not just ritual purity but also *the proper treatment of other human beings*” (emphasis added).

56 Such as in Chapter 14, *The parables and words of Christ*; and Chapter 16, *The love of money: a global banking perspective*.

and temple cult in Jerusalem. However, I am aware that, while Hengel (1981:xi), for example, lauds Jeremias as “the most significant New Testament scholar of the last generation in Germany”, and Leaney (1971:35) calls him “one of the greatest New Testament scholars of our time”, he is not without his critics. Consequently, Jeremias’ study of the economic conditions in Jerusalem should be treated with caution, since he has been accused of not applying any kind of literary or form-critical examination to his historical-economic source materials. As Neusner (1971:202) comments: “The work everywhere assumes the equally historical usefulness of all references to Jerusalem (and many not to Jerusalem), wherever and whenever they appear [...] Everything, whether early or late, is taken equally seriously [...] the texts are read in a completely literal and uncritical spirit”.

Also, potential problems arise when scholars like Schürer et al and Jeremias – plus others, such as Foakes Jackson and Lake, Bruce, Hengel, Conzelmann, Marshall and Read-Heimerdinger – use the Mishnah to support their exegesis of NT passages. The central issue here is whether the rabbinical literature, codified by Judah the Patriarch between 180 and 200 CE, is an appropriate source to use in examining and/or interpreting events that occurred in Jerusalem in the first half of the first century CE.⁵⁷ However, we are informed by Smith (1990:731–732) that the Mishnah is based on the oral tradition handed down over the centuries from Ezra (fifth century BCE) to the period dominated by the famous Pharisee scholars, Hillel and Shammai (just prior to 10 CE). Consequently, when a NT scholar like Jeremias (1969:126–127) claims, for example, that the rabbinical edict setting a limit on the percentage of their “means” that people could give away in pious or charitable donations was “recognized as a precept in the first century AD”, we can appreciate the reasons why such a claim is valid.⁵⁸ Therefore, I would suggest that, where the appropriate care is exhibited, particular Mishnah references can be considered relevant to the present study.

In addition, Jeremias, Schürer et al – and also this treatise – have drawn heavily on Josephus, who Schürer et al (1979:221–222) describe as “the best known historian of Jewish affairs in the Greek language”; however, doubts have been raised concerning the reliability of this ancient source, an issue that has never been truly resolved. Broshi (1982) notes that “duality of sharp criticism alongside fulsome appreciation has consistently accompanied the scholarly treatment of Josephus’ works”. While, more specifically, Oesterley

57 For further reading on this broad topic, including the dating of the rabbinic literature, see Instone-Brewer (2004), also Neusner (1973 and 1990).

58 Especially since his claim is confirmed by other scholars, such as Hengel (1974:20).

and Robinson (1957:5) warn that “his prejudices and idiosyncrasies make it sometimes necessary to use his evidence with caution”; since, according to Broshi, his “inaccuracies range from vagueness to blatant exaggeration”. For example, he has a tendency to gross overstatement concerning population figures. Hence, we read in *War* 6.420 that the inhabitants of first-century Galilee (supposedly) numbered more than three million; also, in the census carried out under Cestius, celebrants at the Passover sacrifices (reputedly) totalled in excess of two million seven hundred thousand – a highly inflated figure when compared to the range of estimates given by modern scholars: e.g. Jeremias (180,000)⁵⁹ and Sanders (300,000 to 500,000).⁶⁰ Shutt (1961:122–123) agrees that “The numerals in Josephus, which are frequently exaggerated and generally untrustworthy, are an unsatisfactory side of his work”; however, he contends that “it cannot be said that their unreliability detracts from Josephus’ merits as a historian [...] Such unreliability is frequently due to manuscript tradition and not to the author”.⁶¹

Alternatively, Broshi (1982) argues that “In Josephus’ *War*, much of the data can be proved accurate and much of the rest reliably assumed to be so”.⁶² And he further asserts that, where scholars have been able to check the archaeological detail provided by Josephus, his “precision” is surprising, and that generally his data “stem from reliable sources to which he had access from the very beginning of his literary career”.⁶³ Finally, Sandmel (in Thackeray, 1969:xii) sums up the general consensus/dilemma when he states that “Even when we become suspicious of Josephus’ reliability and even when we can convict him of contradiction, and of uncontrolled apologetic tendencies, we are faced with

59 Jeremias’ estimate (1969:83) consists of 125,000 visitors and 55,000 residents.

60 While acknowledging the “uncertainty” of ascertaining ancient numbers, Sanders (1992:127–128) has based his numbers on a “reliable” estimate of the Jewish population in Palestine “being less than a million, possibly only about half that amount”, plus the likelihood that “Herod’s temple [...] could accommodate 400,000 pilgrims”.

61 The question of Josephus’ reliability is also discussed extensively in Feldman and Hata (1987): e.g. by Stern (1987:71–80), Rajak (1987:81–94) and Ladouceur (1987:95–113).

62 Surburg (1975:165) states that “A comparison between *The Jewish War* and *Life* does not present a consistent portrayal of the Galilean campaign”. However, he suggests that any inconsistencies may be due to the fact that the two books were written for different patrons: e.g. *War* was written under Roman patronage, which may explain its pro-Roman bias. He also cites the suspicion by Laquer (in *Der juedische Historiker Flavius Josephus*) that the misrepresentation of certain details in *Life* was done so that Josephus might find favour with King Agrippa II, his other patron.

63 Similarly, Thackeray (1969:19–20) admits that, “as a writer, [Josephus] lacks some of the essential qualifications of the great historian”; however, “we must not be led to exaggerate his failings or to underestimate his sterling merits and his immense contribution to learning and our knowledge of the past”.

the circumstance that if we were to discard or eliminate Josephus, we would be virtually devoid of a clear knowledge of historical events from the beginning of the Maccabean War through the end of the first Christian century”.⁶⁴ In addition, Feldman and Hata (1987:14) contend that the level of detail that Josephus provides for the era just before and during the emergence of Christianity “is crucial for an understanding of the infant years of the new religious group”.

64 Sandmel also argues that “The significance of Josephus in regard to the first Christian century in Jewish and Christian scholarship is that he represents the only major source which gives a direct and *sequential* historical account”.

Peter's Pentecost Sermon

2.1 Hearing about Jesus, but Thinking about Joel

When the prophets castigated the people because of their disloyalty and neglect of the obligations which lay upon them because of their privileged position, they were not preaching in a vacuum. Rather, the people were reminded of what they knew, or should have known.

THOMPSON, 1981:6

On the Day of Pentecost, when the multitude of devout, Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem were “astonished and bewildered” by the outbreak of glossolalia (Acts 2:6), the apostle Peter stepped forward to explain the significance of this phenomenon with a brief, introductory reference to the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16–17), and then went on to preach his famous sermon.

Since the average reader is usually impatient to pour over the ostensibly more important sections of Luke's account of the dramatic birth of the Christian church, the reference to Joel is often in danger of being glossed over, like some brief curtain-raiser to the main event; namely, the more compelling content of Peter's sermon. As such, there is a tendency to view the reference to Joel as something akin to a “preacher's gimmick”; a device to gain the audience's attention, rather than providing any kind of far-reaching and meaningful context for the entire sermon. However, I suggest that this would definitely *not* have been the case for the multitude gathered in Jerusalem on that momentous occasion. And it is specifically the human, emotional responses of Peter's audience of Diaspora Jews that attracts my interest in this portion of the study.

Put simply, Luke's rendition of Peter's sermon – as it has been handed down over the centuries – does not appear to do proper homage and thus full justice to the debt it owes to Joel. In particular, the enigmatic amendment/misquote in the introduction, as it appears in Acts 2:17 in the more widely-accepted MSS, has become something of a theological “red herring” – not only distracting and/or confusing generations of scholars, but also depriving Christianity of the material benefits of understanding the wider context of Peter's message. As Bauckham (1996:163) writes, “In Acts 2:17, the words μετὰ ταῦτα (‘after these things’) in LXX Joel 3:1 are replaced by ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις (‘in the last days’)”; however, it is interesting to note that not all the MSS agree on the text in Peter's opening phrase. Conzelmann (1987:19) explains that “The quotation

has been transmitted in two recensions B and D. At the beginning of the quotation, B and sa have (with the LXX) μετὰ ταῦτα, ‘after these things’, instead of ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, ‘in the last days’.¹ In fact, *meta tauta*, ‘after these things’, is used in Acts 2:17 not only in B (*Codex Vaticanus*, fourth century CE) and cop^{sa} (Sahidic Coptic MS), but also in C (*Ephraemi rescriptus*, fifth century), pc (a Greek miniscule) and 076 (a Greek uncial from the fifth or sixth century); as well as by Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in 386 CE.²

To my mind, the various rationales for this amendment lack credibility, particularly since Luke is normally so faithful to the LXX.³ Some scholars have tried to justify the change by adopting an overly-simplistic view based somewhat precariously on nothing more than modern, western logic; as Bauckham continues (1996:163): “μετὰ ταῦτα presupposes preceding events which are not explained”. But then, not explained is not the same as not understood. Likewise, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:21) suggest that the phrase ‘after these things’ is unintelligible without the context to show what “these things” are. But here again, just because the context has not been articulated in full does not mean that it was not understood in its fullest sense by Peter’s audience. The unsatisfactory results arising from this flawed logic have led these and other scholars to seek further justifications for the substitution. Hence, Johnson and Harrington (1992:49) write that, “Although the citation from Joel 3:1–5 agrees substantially with the LXX, there are several changes that in all likelihood represent changes made by Luke to fit the text to the context”. Similarly, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:21) assert that “The Western text represents a series of changes from the LXX all making the quotation more suitable for the occasion”.

However, in making these assertions, both pairs of exegetes fail to provide an adequate explanation of either context or occasion; and I suggest that this would only be possible with, firstly, a proper understanding of the economic context provided by Joel 1 and 2; and, secondly, detailed knowledge of

1 Also mentioned in Klijn (1976:104), who explains that, “At the moment there is a tendency to consider D secondary to B, because D shows some marked theological trends which can only be explained as elements introduced into a text like B”. On the other hand, Haenchen (1971:179) is more emphatic. He claims that “The text of B, *meta tauta*, is the original: in Lucan theology, the last days do not begin as soon as the Spirit has been outpoured!”

2 See www.laparola.net/greco/index.php and search on Acts 2:17 with a request to view variant readings; accessed on July 24th 2011.

3 According to Marshall (1980:18), “one of the most striking literary features of the writings of Luke is that they are written in the style of the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX)”; also, Johnson and Harrington (1992:61) assert that Luke was “unquestionably” using the LXX “for the composition of his work”.

the economic background to the occasion: i.e. the Day of Pentecost in 33 CE.⁴ In fact, the failure to use an economic perspective as an exegetical tool has left us with something of an hermeneutic quandary, because the traditional over-spiritualisation of the text (i.e. an exclusive focus on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and total neglect of any possible attendant outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine”) has demoted the powerful OT salvation-restoration oracle to one of salvation-only. And worse, it also implies that, when the promised Messiah finally arrived, followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Yahweh uncharacteristically chose to renege on something like half of the benefits He originally offered.

Thus I find it astonishing that, when faced with centuries of OT prophecy concerning how economic restoration is supposed to occur in tandem with spiritual renewal, NT scholars have chosen to interpret Pentecost as being solely about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, they appear to have ignored completely the far-reaching implications of numerous references to the promised outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” as in say Deuteronomy 7:13 & 11:14; Jeremiah 31:12; Hosea 2:22 and Zechariah 9:17; plus Joel 2:18–19 & 24–27 – along with the specific promise in Joel 3:1 to restore the fortunes of the people of Yahweh; not to mention Ezekiel 36:10–11, which promises restoration of an even greater magnitude than experienced previously. These latter texts are replete with promises of economic restoration in conjunction with spiritual transformation – both explicit and implicit. Consequently, they provide an unambiguous economic context for Acts 2:17–41 that is both plausible and also extremely potent. On that basis, I suggest that Peter’s audience of first-century Jews would have fully understood what “these things” were, which makes the phrase *meta tauta*, ‘after these things’, the more appropriate text for the introduction to his Pentecost sermon.

Finally, in order to attempt to explain why *meta tauta* (‘after these things’) has been replaced by *en tais eschatais hēmerais* (‘in the last days’) in Acts 2:17, some scholars have grasped at the straw of eschatology,⁵ which again puts

4 For the arguments concerning the choice of this date for the original Day of Pentecost, see Chapter 3.5, *The time spent on ‘this business’*.

5 By ignoring the economic implications of certain passages in the early chapters of Acts, NT scholars have been left with no alternative but to accept the seemingly logical but erroneous conclusion that the promised outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” did not occur alongside the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and was thus supposedly meant to take place at some unknown stage in the future. A good example of this is the opinion expressed by Ste. Croix (2001:426) regarding Christ’s promises to “the poor” and “the hungry” in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3, 6). He writes that “the fulfilment of the blessings is intended eschatologically: they will be realised not in this world but in the Age to come”.

them potentially on unsafe ground. For example, Barrett (1994:135) explains that “the quotation from Joel, in the form in which Luke gives it (his Christian interpretation involves some changes in the text), is important for Luke’s understanding of eschatology: God has begun, but not completed, the work of fulfilment; Christians are living in the last days, but the last days are not yet come”. Likewise, according to Johnson and Harrington (1992:54), “Luke alters the citation from LXX Joel 3:1–5 in several important ways, making the Spirit’s outpouring an eschatological, and above all, a prophetic event”. Against this, Jervell (1996:106) argues that “Unlike other New Testament authors, history means more to Luke than eschatology”.⁶ And Sterling (1992:359) likewise disagrees, explaining that Luke is writing “history from the perspective of the fulfilment of the [OT] promises and prophecies”. Besides, when viewed against the backdrop of so many OT promises of material blessing and abundant prosperity offered in return for repentance and obedience, this statement from Barrett again implies fickleness on the part of Yahweh.

After all, if that first group of Jews who responded positively to Peter’s message believed that they were living in the last days, they would have expected to enjoy the economic benefits of those last days – once they repented and became part of the godly “remnant”. But if those last days had not yet come, does this mean that they had to wait for those particular benefits; and, if so, how long? For people who need to put food on the table, these are more than just theological questions; especially in the midst of an economic crisis, as explained in some detail below.⁷ Also, any suggestion that Luke had to adapt the LXX Joel 3:1 reference because Peter was ushering in a new, “Christian” era (as implied in Barrett’s statement above) runs contrary to Kippenburg’s contention (1994:96) that the political environment would have compelled Luke to present Christianity as a continuation of the Jewish tradition (i.e. as an “ancestral religion”),⁸ because “the Roman authorities only officially recognized cults

6 Jervell claims that “Luke’s task [in Acts] is to offer the history of the people of God in the last phase of salvation history”.

7 See Chapters 2.4, *The Roman financial crisis of 33 CE*, and 2.5, *Economic conditions in first-century Jerusalem*.

8 Seccombe (2022:91) agrees that Luke, “of all the evangelists most stresses the continuity between Christianity and Judaism”. Likewise, Sterling (1992:381) writes that “Christianity is not a new movement, but the *continuation* of Israel”; and Armstrong (1997:159) insists that “Continuity is very important to Luke, as it was for most people in late antiquity. Innovation and novelty were suspect, and it was crucial for religious people to know that their faith was deeply rooted in the sanctities of the past”. Also, van Unnik (1976:25) suggests that Luke “underscores the relation between Christianity and Judaism to prevent the Roman authorities from looking upon Christianity as a new and dangerous religion”; perhaps because, as Sterling (1992:385) further writes, “The emergence of Christianity as a separate movement

that were 'ancestral'. This is corroborated by Botticini and Eckstein (2003:13) who explain that, "Up to the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 135, the Romans themselves did not distinguish between Jews and early Christians".

Fortunately, I believe that some of this exegetical fog will dissipate when the text of the early part of Acts is viewed through the lens of human economic expectations. As mentioned earlier, a lack of appreciation of the economic context of Peter's Pentecost sermon has been the cause of a significant amount of scholarly over-spiritualisation. This has impacted our understanding of not just the wider implications of Peter's message (e.g. the more complex manner in which a Jewish audience would have emotionally and/or intellectually processed the apostle's reference to Joel), but also the all-important human dynamics underlying the Pentecost event itself. Consequently, I intend to address this exegetical oversight in some depth. Meanwhile, I suggest that the traditional acceptance and usage of *en tais eschatais hēmerais*, 'in the last days', by the majority of MSS in Acts 2:17 (rather than *meta tauta*, 'after these things'), plus the supposed "Christian interpretation" of Joel (either by Luke but, more likely, later groups) has been detrimental rather than helpful.

Therefore, in order to fully understand the importance of Peter's reference to Joel, it is necessary that we revisit the early part of that OT book and re-examine the prophet's dramatic depiction of a real-life agrarian economic calamity, which Wolff (1977:12) confirms was "an acute emergency in his own day";⁹ and which Allen (1976:53) describes somewhat melodramatically as "grim cameos of the contemporary scene depicted with heavy brushstrokes".

made it vulnerable to persecution"; thus, "The claim that Christianity was a continuation of Judaism was a way of claiming the standing of Judaism".

- 9 The dating of the Book of Joel has been a matter of some debate. Its position within the canon of scripture between Hosea and Amos has suggested a similar dating: i.e. eighth century BCE. However, this placement does not appear to be based on the date of writing but on a similarity of theme when compared with Amos. For example, Bratcher (1997:258) informs us that "the language of Joel 2:31 and 3:16, 18–19 concerning the Day of Yahweh closely resembles the beginning of Amos". But she subsequently argues that other factors suggest a later date: e.g. "Hebrew terms and expressions are used in Joel that appear elsewhere only in later in OT books (see Thompson, 1956:731–732, and Wolff, 1977:10–11 for a detailed list). The book shows a dependence on the thoughts of other prophets, including notably the late prophets Obadiah (v. 17 *cf* Joel 2:32) and Malachi (3:2; 4:5 *cf* Joel 2:11, 31). These examples suggest that Joel must be dated sometime after the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah and before the Hellenistic conquest of Judah, most likely the first half of the fourth century BC or the end of the fifth century BC".

The field is laid waste, the ground mourns; for the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails.

Joel 1:10

Allen (1976:53–54) informs us that grain, oil and new wine were “the principal crops of the Palestinian farmers and are celebrated in the OT as generous gifts of God (*cf.* Deuteronomy 7:13, etc.; Hosea 2:8, 10; *cf.* Psalm 104:15*f.*). Joel employs a traditional formula in referring to these products, but he puts it to sinister use. The fertility hailed in OT times as a pledge of the harmony between Israel and its God had disappeared”. This occurrence, according to Wolff (1977:31), “fulfils ancient prophetic threats of judgment”; and Allen (1976:79) adds that “Joel’s whole interpretation of the locust plague does presuppose serious sin in the life of the community”.

Be ashamed, O you tillers of the soil; wail, O you vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished.

The vine is dried up and the fig tree fails; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple or quince tree, even all the trees of the field are withered, so that joy has withered and fled away from the sons of men.

Joel 1:11–12

Wolff (1977:32) comments here that “Lack of a harvest is a disgrace for the peasant, just as childlessness is for parents, for it is evidence that the blessing is withdrawn (2:14) [...] Joy withers together with the harvest (*cf.* Isaiah 9:2[3]); it gives way to shame”. Also, Allen (1976:54) reminds us that wheat and barley were the most important of the Palestinian cereals, but now, “there were no cereals to sell, or seed to sow next season, and the economic consequences for the farmer were disastrous”. The balance of verses 11 and 12 state that the vineyards and fruit trees also did not yield any harvest, and Allen writes that “One might regard the calamity as solely the effect of the plague of locusts, but vv. 18–20 mention a drought, with which a locust attack not infrequently coincides”. In this situation, the land and plants are unable to regenerate themselves naturally. The implication therefore is that the solution has to come from some greater, more powerful source; thus setting the scene for the necessary intervention of Yahweh.

At this point, Joel reminds the priests that the cult ritual as well as their personal welfare is also dependent on the harvests being plentiful, and exploits this issue to urge them to summon the people to a traditional service of lamentation, in order to petition Yahweh to reverse His judgment on the nation.

Then, in Joel 2:1–12, when the prophet seems to sense that he has his audience's full attention,¹⁰ he seizes the opportunity to drive home his message by amplifying the potential gravity of their plight and also implying that, if they do not remedy the situation as soon as possible, the existing calamity, bad enough as it is, may escalate into the ultimate “worst case scenario”, as proclaimed by prophets of old: i.e. the “Day of Yahweh” (e.g. Isaiah 13:6, 9–11; 24:21–23 *cf.* Acts 2:20). But then, to stop his audience from falling into utter despair, Joel offers some hope of compassion on Yahweh's part, and holds out the possibility of this horrific threat being averted.

Therefore also now, says the Lord, turn and keep on coming to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning [until every hindrance is removed and the broken fellowship is restored].

Rend your hearts and not your garments and return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness; and He revokes His sentence of evil [when His conditions are met].

Joel 2:12–13

Apparently, as Newsome (1984:108) explains, around the time of Jehoiakim's coronation (c.609 BCE), there emerged what he calls “a twisted parody” of the teaching dealing with Isaiah's statement of Yahweh's concern for the protection of Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:33–35), combined with Josiah's edict that all worship should be centralised there.¹¹ This gave rise to the erroneous belief that, because Jerusalem was deemed Yahweh's special city, no harm could ever befall it; and also, that Yahweh's protection was unconditional. As a consequence, the people of Yahweh had on numerous occasions thought that they could take for granted or even manipulate His blessing through mere ritual, or by resorting to some claim of special status, rather than a demonstration of true repentance. However, in this instance, according to Allen (1976:79), Yahweh “will not be satisfied with a perfunctory show of repentance, prompted by a shrewd and selfish desire to save their skins. On one occasion the complaint

10 Allen (1976:78) writes that “Now is the psychological moment. It signifies both a consequence and a caution; since the people are in their present circumstances of distress, they must respond before it is too late”.

11 Skinner (1963:167) confirms that “the vindication of Isaiah's faith had no other effect than to foster a belief in the inviolability of the Temple, which ultimately hardened into a dogma of the popular religion”.

was made that Judah had not returned to Him *wholeheartedly*, but in pretence (Jeremiah 3:10).¹² Now it is to be sincere and heartfelt”.

Then, if or when the required level of repentance occurs, and the people wholeheartedly ‘turn back’ to Yahweh,¹³ Joel states that the Lord is willing, if not eager, to reinstate His blessing, which, according to Allen (1976:82), is viewed in terms of material symbols of divine favour.

Then was the Lord jealous for His land and had pity on His people.

Yes, the Lord answered and said to His people, Behold, I am sending you grain and new wine and oil, and you shall be satisfied with them; and I will no more make you a reproach among the [heathen] nations.

And the [threshing] floors shall be full of grain and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

And I will restore or replace for you the years that the locust has eaten – the hopping locust, the stripping locust, and the crawling locust, My great army which I sent among you.

And you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord, your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you. And My people shall never be put to shame.

And you shall know, understand, and realize that I am in the midst of Israel and that I the Lord am your God and there is none else. My people shall never be put to shame.

Joel 2:18–19, 24–27

At this crucial stage when or, more critically, *after* the promise of full economic restoration and blessing is presented to the people of Judah in all its enticing abundance, then comes the verse that – if LXX Joel 3:1 was quoted faithfully – should have been used as the opening gambit to Peter’s sermon in Acts: “And *afterward* (Hebrew: אַחֲרַי, *‘aḥar*; cf. LXX, *meta tauta*) I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh”.

12 Describing the situation during the time of Jeremiah, Thompson (1981:62) writes that “Deep repentance, inward and sincere acceptance of the obligations of the covenant would alone fulfil the requirements of Yahweh. One could recite ‘The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh’ (Jeremiah 7:4) and still tolerate all kinds of personal evils and breaches of the covenant (Jeremiah 7:5–10)”.

13 Bratcher (1997:265) states that, in Joel 2:13, “The people are called to return, or repent (Heb. *šûb*), in the traditional, prophetic understanding of repentance”; and explains that, “to return with one’s heart, which is in Hebrew the center of the will, is a call to turn toward Yahweh exercising the very center of the self’s power to choose its way, establish its priorities, and fix its loyalties”.

Consequently, I would argue that, by quoting from Joel, Peter was not only providing an explanation for certain spiritual phenomena, he was also alluding to the full range of attendant economic conditions/benefits – and his audience of God-fearing Jews from the Diaspora would have understood that unequivocally. In support, we have the assertion by Johnson and Harrington (1992:60) that “Peter interprets this outpouring of the Spirit and its extension to [his hearers] in terms of the promises of God to Abraham” – which by implication includes the promise of economic blessing. They further claim that “the reason why the prophecy of Joel is so perfect is because it contains both an outpouring of the Spirit *and* the proclamation of the good news to a restored remnant of the people of Israel, all this happening in Jerusalem!” Thus, through the message of both prophet and apostle, as Wolff (1977:104) reminds us, “God was working in a way consonant with the hopes of devout Jews”, which matches both the description and situation of Peter’s audience in Acts 2:5. Finally, the above scenario becomes even more credible if we appreciate that Pentecost took place during a period of economic crisis in both Italy and Palestine, as explained in detail below.

At this point, however, it would be helpful to return to the Day of Pentecost in 33 CE, in order to examine how comprehensively the words of the apostle Peter – and their implications – were aligned with those of the earlier prophet. Firstly, Allen (1976:77) describes the opening chapter of Joel as forming “a basic pattern of appeal in the form of the messenger-formula [...] a motivation made up of the elements of *promise, accusation and threat*” (emphasis added); and these three elements can be seen repeated in the content and structure of Peter’s Pentecost sermon. Secondly, he argues (1976:54) that the prophet Joel was speaking about events of which his audience were only too painfully aware,¹⁴ which applies equally to Peter’s audience in first-century Jerusalem. Thirdly, from the above, it is obvious that the aim of both prophet and apostle, as Allen (1976:55) further suggests, is “to present a series of arguments to bring [the audience] to their knees”.

Also providing a link between the two messages we have, for example, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28 *cf.* Acts 2:1–6), which Allen (1976:102) explains “was hailed as the realization in principle of the charismatic gifts enumerated in [Joel’s] ancient oracle”. Furthermore, there are the signs and wonders performed by Jesus throughout His three and a half year ministry (Joel 2:30 *cf.* Acts 2:22), which attested to His position as the promised Messiah and thus the chosen vehicle through which Yahweh would fulfil all elements

14 This is corroborated by Thompson (1981:6), as shown in the quote at the beginning of this chapter.

of His glorious plan. In addition, Peter's audience would have been well aware of the fact that, only seven weeks earlier, on the afternoon of Christ's crucifixion, the sun had indeed turned to darkness and the moon appeared "blood red" (Joel 2:31 *cf.* Acts 2:20; also Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:45), a point that Bruce (1970:90) mentions in his commentary on Acts 2:19–20. He writes that, "Peter's hearers may have associated the phenomena described in vv. 19f. with those which attended the preternatural darkness on Good Friday"; and elsewhere suggests (1981:68) that "the paschal full moon may well have appeared blood-red in the sky in consequence of that preternatural gloom".

As explained in Chapter 3.5, this phenomenon in the heavens was a lunar rather than a solar eclipse; and, according to Humphreys and Waddington (1992:347):

The majority of lunar eclipses pass unnoticed, occurring when people are asleep or indoors. This eclipse, however, would probably have been seen by most of the population of Israel, since the Jews on Passover Day would be looking for both sunset and moonrise in order to commence their Passover meal. Instead of seeing the expected full Paschal moon rising, they would have initially seen a moon with a red 'bite' removed. The effect would be dramatic. The moon would appear to grow to full in the next hour. The crowd on the day of Pentecost would undoubtedly understand Peter's words about the moon turning to blood as referring to this eclipse that they had seen.¹⁵

Finally, even Joel's reference to "the northern army", a term (along with "northerner") that Barton (2001:88) asserts is always used in other parts of the OT to describe a human enemy – who Yahweh promises to remove and deal with severely (Joel 2:20)¹⁶ – would have been pregnant with meaning to Peter's hearers, given the nation's occupation by Roman troops at that time.

From Wolff (1977:5–6) we learn that, in Judah, during the time of Joel, "The cultic community is well organized. As part of the smoothly functioning Persian Empire, the community is no longer troubled by external unrest. With its theocratic leadership and the canonized Torah to guide it, performing the daily

15 Humphreys and Waddington (1983:746) cite the illustration by D. Davis (in di Cicco, 1982:391) of a lunar eclipse sequence "as seen by the human eye with the Moon low in the sky, when the blood red of the umbra in the partial eclipse is almost as vivid as when the eclipse is total".

16 We should not interpret this reference as more locusts *per se* (i.e. more natural calamity), since Wolff (1977:60) reminds us that "the locusts in Palestine came, as a rule, from the east (Exodus 10:19) or south".

sacrifices, and having purified itself from within of all that was foreign, the community's mood is one of confidence in the inviolability of its own salvation and in Jerusalem's election as the throne of Yahweh's kingdom". Similarly, centuries later, the reforms of Augustus had brought political stability to the entire Roman Empire. So, even though the fourth-century harvests and first-century economic conditions were notably grave, the political situation during both periods seemed to be ticking along just fine. However, that's not the way that either prophet or apostle perceived matters.

As far as Joel was concerned, "from the perspective of earlier prophecy it had to be recognized that the relationship between Israel and the world of nations – as represented by the contemporary Jerusalemite cultic community incorporated into the political framework of a Persian satrapy – was not in keeping with the ultimate will of the God of Israel" (Wolff, 1977:12). Likewise, we note that Peter was present when the apostles asked Christ, "Lord, is this the time when You will re-establish the kingdom and restore it to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) because, according to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:6), "the disciples connect[ed] the promise of the Spirit with the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel". This, plus Peter's reference in his sermon to "the Day of Yahweh" (Acts 2:20), a motif (also from Joel)¹⁷ that contains the promise to remove the "northern armies" far off (Joel 2:20), would suggest that he too, along with perhaps the rest of the apostles, did not believe that the Roman occupancy was in keeping with the ultimate will of the God of Israel – a fact that may have been evident to the pro-Roman Sadducee elite in his audience.

And so, in 33 CE, Peter's sermon, patterned heavily on Joel's model of the three elements of promise, accusation and threat, did indeed achieve what both apostle and prophet before him had intended. In a manner that was highly credible and ultimately persuasive, Peter presented his Jerusalem audience of devout, God-fearing Jews with a powerful and compelling argument concerning the reasons for (and solution to) their economic and political plight – as implied by his allusion to the salvation-restoration oracle in the Book of Joel. Faced with such an argument, many of Peter's audience would not have exhibited Barrett's suggested ambivalence concerning the timing of what was occurring, since Acts 2:41 indicates that around 3,000 of them were convinced by Peter's message that, in line with Joel's earlier prophecy, the real-life, albeit non-agrarian economic crisis they were all too painfully aware of¹⁸ had the

¹⁷ See Joel 1:15; 2:1, 20, 31 and 3:14.

¹⁸ See Chapters 2.4, *The Roman financial crisis of 33 CE*, and 2.5, *Economic conditions in first-century Jerusalem*.

potential to escalate into their worst nightmare: namely, the Day of Yahweh. It is little wonder they wasted no time in asking the apostles what to do about it.

Now when they heard this they were stung (cut) to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles (special messengers), Brethren, what shall we do?

And Peter answered them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of and release from your sins.

Acts 2:37–38

According to Allen (1976:104), “the appeal for repentance in Acts 2:38 has an obvious affinity with Joel’s call in Joel 2:12*f*.; the sacrament of baptism replacing the mourning [i.e. lamentation] rites”. Likewise, Marshall (1980:81) states that, “For John the Baptist, baptism was an expression of repentance. The early Christians took over the same rite, but its meaning was enlarged”.

Finally, Luke’s account of Peter’s sermon concludes with the instruction: “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40); and Lüdemann (1989:47) explains that “The *sothete* in the concluding appeal in 2:40b [...] picks up the last word of the Joel quotation (*sothesetai*, LXX Joel 2:32 *cf.* Acts 2:21)”; a point also mentioned by Johnson and Harrington (1992:58). Thus, it could be said that Joel’s prophetic message not only opens but also closes Peter’s sermon. Furthermore, it provides a framework for its structure, arguments and objective, and is the source of some crucial content and authentication. And, in addition, we know from Joel that repentance (of the true, heart-felt kind) was the key to initiating the restoration of Yahweh’s material blessing. Therefore, it would be helpful to examine the expectations amongst Peter’s first-century audience of Diaspora Jews concerning the *non*-spiritual (e.g. economic) benefits they believed they would receive in return for their repentance.

Allen (1976:95) informs us that, in Joel 2:24–27, Yahweh promised not simply to restore His material blessing, but to go significantly beyond this covenant obligation and also make up for the produce lost in the years when locusts had ravaged the crops.¹⁹ He writes that Yahweh offered full compensation: “The bad years would be compensated by an especially good year”,²⁰ which would

19 Apparently, according to Allen, the locust attacks were not confined to a single year, but had occurred over several years in succession.

20 Wolff (1977:64) explains that “To restore (*pi’el*) is an old legal term for the adjustment of damages; it designates the rendering of a substitute payment or of restitution”. Likewise, Allen (1976:95) mentions the use of a legal term for indemnifying.

supposedly result in an extraordinary surplus of abundance that would be recognised and, more importantly, acknowledged by the people – through acts of praise – as the kind of wondrous works that only Yahweh was capable of performing. Therefore, given the critical economic conditions, and with an abundant outpouring of the first-century equivalent of “grain, oil and new wine” on offer, it is not unreasonable to expect that some of the 3,000 souls who responded to Peter’s call (Acts 2:41) would have been swayed by such extraordinary economic enticements, and repented for what Baumgarten (1997:63) has called “more mundane reasons”.

Consequently, from the evidence given above, I believe we may conclude that, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter’s audience would have had very strong reasons to be thinking about Joel (along with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, no doubt) – or, more importantly, the spiritual associations with economic disaster and restoration described in those books – while they were hearing about Jesus. To disagree would be to deny or at least underestimate the emotive power and influence of the OT salvation-restoration oracles on the multitude of Jews assembled that day. It would also deny their desperate need to obtain relief from the effects of the serious economic crisis they were experiencing at the time. And since it was “the third hour” (Acts 2:15), it is highly likely that many of Peter’s hearers had just come from the Temple, where they had been celebrating the Feast of Weeks by presenting the first fruits of their particular economic harvests – which, in 33 CE, might not have provided much cause for celebration.²¹ Finally, if we argue that they were *not* thinking about Joel while hearing about Jesus, we would also be seriously underestimating the desires of many in the audience to see radical change for the better in the administration of the religious, political and economic affairs of the holy capital and Jewish religion worldwide.

I am not suggesting that Peter’s hearers were attracted to his message solely on the basis of any implicit or explicit economic promises that it appeared to contain. Such a patently mercenary mind-set would not be in keeping with the calibre of men described as “devout” or “pious” (Acts 2:5). However, to ignore the possibility that many of them were convinced and also convicted that their economic problems (and the solution to those problems) were somehow linked to the spiritual condition of their nation would be naïve indeed. And to disregard this important dynamic in the modern era, especially as it pertains

21 The Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*) also commemorates the anniversary of when the Children of Israel were given the Torah by Yahweh, which makes it extremely likely that particular elements of the OT covenant would have been on the minds of Peter’s audience as well.

to evangelism and/or missionary efforts, would not only be naïve, but also counterproductive.

2.2 The Initial Tranche of Converts

Now there were then residing in Jerusalem Jews, devout and God-fearing men from every country under heaven.

Acts 2:5

There are three important questions to be answered concerning this group from whom, according to Luke, the initial tranche of converts to the nascent sect were drawn. Firstly, were they Jews only, or a mixture of Jews and Gentile “God-fearers”? Secondly, were they residents or festal pilgrims? And thirdly, how wide an area were they drawn from?

On the first question, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1920:18), Bruce (1970:83), Barrett (1994:118) and Witherington (1998:135) all explain that the use of εὐλαβής (*eulabēs*, ‘devout’; also ‘pious, religious, reverencing God’) – as found elsewhere in Acts 8:2, 22:12 and also Luke 2:25 – means that these men were Jews and *not* God-fearing Gentiles;²² i.e. Gentiles who were attracted to Jewish ethics, theology and worship, but did not become proselytes.²³ Barrett argues specifically that, “On the basis of evidence the adjective [*eulabēs*] can hardly be taken to denote a specific class of ‘God-fearers’”,²⁴ a category of person that does not appear in the Lukan narrative until Acts 10:2, when we meet Cornelius, the centurion.²⁵ Consequently, I find problems with Esler

22 According to Trench’s *Synonyms of the New Testament*, all NT uses of *eulabēs* express Jewish or OT piety; and Bruce (1970:83) agrees that “In the NT εὐλαβής is used only of Jews”.

23 For a detailed and helpful exposition of “God-fearers”, see Barrett (1994:499–501).

24 He cites Bultmann (no specific reference), also Kittel and Friedrich, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 2.750, and H. Kosmala, *Hebräer-Essener-Christen* (Studia, Post-Biblica 1: Leiden, 1959), pp. 71, 297, 341.

25 In his descriptions of Cornelius and one of his soldiers (Acts 10:2 and 10:7), Luke uses a different word for ‘devout’ or ‘pious’: εὐσεβής (*eusebēs*, meaning ‘piety in the fulfilment of human relations’ as well as ‘piety towards God’). It is also rendered as ‘God-fearing’ or ‘one who feared the Lord’ (AMPC, DRA and GNV); or ‘one who worshipped God’ (CEV). According to Runesson et al (2008:120–121), Luke also uses the phrase *phoboumenos ton theon* (‘fearing God’) or *sebomenos ton theon* (‘worshipping God’) to designate God-fearing Gentiles: e.g. Acts 13:16 (at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch); 13:50 (the ‘devout’ women of high standing in the same town); 16:14 (Lydia, the seller of purple at Philippi); 17:4 (a large company of God-fearing Greeks); 17:17 (‘devout’ persons in the synagogue at Athens); and 18:7 (Titus Justus, who owned the house next to the synagogue in Corinth, and who is described as ‘one worshipping God’).

(1989:154–163), who expends a lot of effort to establish the presence of Gentile God-fearers in Jerusalem, in order to support his theories concerning their possible impact within the primitive church community – even to the point of arguing that their relationship with the Hellenist Jews in the congregation, involving potential table-fellowship, was a key component of the so-called conflict between the Hebrews and Hellenists mentioned in Acts 6:1. Even so, he does not attempt to claim that these Gentile God-fearers were part of the ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς mentioned in Acts 2:5.²⁶

On the second question, it is extremely doubtful that Luke is referring here to festal pilgrims. From Philo (*Special Laws* 1, 69), we learn that “Countless multitudes from countless cities come, some over land, others over sea, from east and west and north and south, at every feast”. However, Sanders (1992:130) explains that Jews in the Diaspora were exempt from the biblical requirement to attend three festivals each year.²⁷ He also asserts that it is doubtful that many came more than once in their lifetime; and the most likely reason for this is a combination of distance and expense. Jeremias (1969:76) agrees that the poorer people, as well as those living at a great distance, could only afford to make the journey at Passover. Consequently, of the three major festivals, Passover drew the biggest crowds; and, as mentioned previously, modern scholarly estimates range from 180,000 (Jeremias, 1969:83) to between 300,000 and 500,000 (Sanders, 1992:128).

Jeremias (1969:59) asserts that the journey was usually made on foot and, on the whole, the roads were bad. Hence, Leyerle (2000:460) comments on the slow the pace of road travel in those days; citing Casson's estimate (1974:188) that a person walking on level ground, could only manage on average 15–20

26 Esler (1987:160) claims – but admits it cannot be proven – that there were Gentile God-fearers amongst the *Hellēnistae* in the primitive church in Jerusalem; but he does not offer any suggestions as to when they may have joined the congregation. Against this, Fitzmeyer (1976:238) argues that, in Acts 6:1, “the distinction of Hellenists and Hebrews does not introduce into the [Jerusalem] church a non-Jewish element”. Furthermore, Peter's comment when he arrived at the house of Cornelius, concerning “how it is not lawful or permissible for a Jew to keep company with or to visit or [even] to come near or to speak first to anyone of another nationality” (Acts 10:28), implies that we cannot assume the presence of Gentile God-fearers within the primitive church until after this event.

27 Sanders (1992:130) cites Josephus' summary of the Mosaic-Sinai law (e.g. Exodus 23:17; 34:23; also Deuteronomy 16:16) to argue that pilgrimage was only required from lands conquered by the Hebrews: “Let them assemble in that city in which they shall establish the temple, three times in the year, from the ends of the land which the Hebrews shall conquer” (*Antiquities* 4.203). He further contends that “the requirement for Palestinians to attend three times each year was either ignored or evaded by exegesis”: e.g. some laws became “dead letters”.

miles per day.²⁸ He also maintains (2000:468–469) that sea travel was problematic. Seasonal weather conditions meant that the Mediterranean was virtually closed to navigation from early November to early March. It seems that “perfectly safe navigation” was confined to the period between May 26th and September 14th because, after that date, “The sea was closed not only because of the real risk of storms but also because of increased cloud cover (Casson 1988:357). With the stars obscured, navigation was impossible on the open sea”. Moreover, sea passage for a pilgrim was in the main an indirect, disjointed and delay-ridden journey, cobbled together by using a combination of predictable cargo routes and other sailing schedules that were often unpredictable.²⁹ For example, Philo (*In Flaccum* 5:26) explains that a passenger travelling to Palestine from Rome was well advised to board a grain ship heading for Alexandria and proceed from there to Palestine.³⁰

Once the pilgrims reached Jerusalem, the high cost of living in the capital would have prohibited the vast majority from staying for the entire seven-week period from Passover to the Festival of Weeks or Harvest (i.e. Pentecost). Jeremias explains that prices were high in the capital because, firstly, it was a large city (1969:33); and, secondly, Jerusalem was “a highland city, always short of water and of raw materials for industry, and lying in a very unfavourable position for trade and commerce” (1969:120). From this, he concludes (1969:120–121) that “this state of affairs was bound to result in a very high cost of living”, and provides the following list of examples:

In Jerusalem one *’isār* would buy only three or four figs, in the country the same money would buy ten or even twenty figs from the tree (*Mishnah Maaseroth* 2.6). We generally find that cattle and pearls (*Mishnah Arakhin* 6.5), crops and wine (*Mishnah Maaser Sheni* 4.1) fetched a higher price in the city than they did in the country [...] Fruit in Jerusalem, as is shown by one example, cost three to six times its price in the country (*Mishnah Maaseroth* 2.5f.). Because of the huge demand, the price of doves for sacrifice was inflated by city profiteers to as much as a hundred times the normal price (*Mishnah Kerithoth* 1.7).

28 Sanders (1992:130) agrees that “a man travelling alone can cover about fifteen miles each day”, and estimates that the 100-mile journey from northern Galilee to Jerusalem would take 7 to 8 days.

29 He also explains (2000:468) that “Ships did not sail on a schedule; they waited for a favourable wind. Passengers were thus compelled to hang about the waterfront (Augustine, *Conf.* 5.8), until a herald announced their ship’s departure (Philostratus, *V. Apoll.* 8.14)”.

30 For a comprehensive review of road and sea travel across the Roman Empire in the first century CE, see Leyerle (2000:458–469).

Furthermore, I would suggest that the time and trouble involved in any return journey would also have made festal pilgrims anxious to return to homes and businesses as soon as their Passover obligations had been fulfilled.

Johnson and Harrington (1992:43) argue that Acts 2:5, 9–11 does not describe festal pilgrims, because the use of κατοικοῦντες (*katoikountes*, literally 'habitual dweller') "indicates Jews who had come from all over the world to settle in the city".³¹ In agreement, Barrett (1994:118) cites Schneider (1980:251) who "thinks that the Jews were not pilgrims from the Diaspora, but Diaspora Jews who had come to live (retire) in or near Jerusalem". Finally, according to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1920:19), the list of cities and countries in Acts 2:9–11 is "a rhetorical way of saying that every nation and land was represented";³² whereas, Bruce (1970:83) modifies the parameters of this list on the basis of religion, writing that ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν in Acts 2:5 translates as "from every land where there were Jews". Consequently, from the above, we can reject the idea that Acts 2:5, 9–11 denotes festal pilgrims, and assume that the crowd from which the converts were drawn on the Day of Pentecost consisted primarily of devout and affluent Jews, from key locations within both the Roman and Parthian empires, who were at that time residing in Jerusalem.

It is important to address these questions because I suggest that a group of affluent (if not wealthy) and well-connected Hellenist converts – from key, political capitals like Susa and Rome,³³ and economically important banking and trading centres such as Alexandria – who were resident and also likely to be involved in commerce in Jerusalem at the time, would pose more of a serious, long-term threat to the vested interests of the Sadducee elite³⁴ than would some visiting pilgrims who, for personal reasons or out of economic necessity, needed to return home to family and business as soon as possible. Also, there

31 Johnson and Harrington are referring to Acts 2:14, where the apostle Peter addresses his Pentecost sermon to "Ye men of Judaea, and all ye who dwell [*katoikountes*] in Jerusalem". Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:19) agree that "the probable meaning [of *katoikountes*] is 'residents in Jerusalem'": i.e. "Jews of the Diaspora who were at present living in Jerusalem and not merely visiting it". Likewise, Schürer et al (1979:149, n. 45) assert that the list in Acts 2:9–11 relates to "Jews from abroad who had settled in Jerusalem".

32 Jeremias (1969:62) calls the list of locations "undoubtedly stylized".

33 Conzelmann (1987:14) agrees that the "visitors" mentioned in Acts 2:10 were Jews who were originally from Rome, but now lived in Jerusalem. However, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:20) assert that "Ῥωμαῖος regularly means a citizen of the Roman Empire, not an inhabitant of the city of Rome (cf. Acts 22:25ff)". It is therefore possible that a significant number of these Jews were freedmen or the offspring of freedmen, who would automatically qualify for Roman citizenship. For more on this group, see Chapter 7.1, *Freedmen and their economic importance*.

34 As discussed in Chapter 6, *The tension between temple and sect*.

is no doubt that these Hellenist-Jewish “residents” were extremely important to the local economy in Jerusalem, which included the Temple cult and the Temple treasury-bank. Consequently, defection by a significant number of this group to a new sect whose Hellenist leaders were considered anti-temple would obviously be a source of serious concern for the Sadducee elite.

2.3 Converting for ‘More Mundane’ Reasons

We tend to assume that, because the “3,000 souls” added to the primitive church on the Day of Pentecost were drawn from a larger audience described as “devout” (Acts 2:5), their decision to repent, be baptised and convert to the new sect would have been made for noble, pious reasons.

However, Baumgarten (1997:63) reminds us that there are examples of conversions within various religious sects for reasons that he calls “more mundane”: i.e. political and/or economic incentives driven by an individual or collective instinct for survival, the desire for a better life, or perhaps even naked ambition in some cases. For example, Botticini and Eckstein (2003:12) assert that, in the first century BCE, many pagans converted to Judaism because they saw that the Jews were doing well from an economic standpoint. Also, when Josephus joined the Pharisees, his decision was apparently motivated by “more mundane” reasons, since he would have had to suppress his distaste for the sect in order to do so.³⁵ In fact, we are told by Baumgarten that he took something like four years to weigh up all the options before deciding on this course of action, which he believed would offer him the best possible prospects for a successful political career in Jerusalem.

Josephus himself also reports possible “mundane” reasons for conversion amongst the Essenes and Qumran communities who he claims (1997:64) both ate well; their diet being significantly richer than the standards of the time, since, in *War* 2.133, he informs us that the Essene meal, for example, included meat and wine. It seems that an abundance of gifted individuals within their communities, who were more intellectually endowed than the “ordinary peasants” in the region, meant that the community was able to employ more advanced agricultural techniques when working the land. As Baumgarten

35 Josephus (*Vita* 1) claims that, through his mother, he was “of the royal blood; for the children of Asamoneus, from whom that family was derived, had both the office of the high priesthood, and the dignity of a king”. Consequently, as a member of the aristocratic priestly class, he would have been expected to join the Sadducee party rather than the Pharisees, who Schürer et al (1979:404) inform us were regarded as “middle class and plebeian intellectuals”.

writes (1997:64–65), “These advantages would have given the Essenes and the Qumran sect an attractiveness that was overwhelming in times of crisis. For the Qumran sect, as we learn from 4QpPs^a iii, 2–5, in days of famine, when the wicked perished, the congregation of God’s chosen ones, as well as those who chose to [join them] fared well”. Finally, Stein (1992:162; in Baumgarten, 1997:65) reminds us that, many centuries later, “the simple but plentiful food of Shaker communities, a result of their technological sophistication and organization, was a source of great appeal to those in need, particularly as winter approached”.

On this basis, we cannot rule out the possibility that some of the “3,000 souls” who responded positively to Peter’s call for repentance and baptism on the Day of Pentecost did so for the more mundane reasons of economic improvement, if not survival; just like the examples given above. After all, the economic conditions in 33 CE were such that people would have been willing to give serious consideration to any possible solution to the acute financial problems they were experiencing, which we shall now examine.

2.4 The Roman Financial Crisis of 33 CE

According to Andreau (1999:102), Rome was regularly afflicted by debt and liquidity crises: e.g. in 193–192 BCE, during the 80s BCE, in 63 BCE, in 49 BCE; and also in 33 CE, during the reign of Tiberius.

Of all the Roman financial crises, this last event has been studied the most thoroughly, and is of significant interest because of its potential impact on the economic and political environment in Jerusalem during the period immediately prior to and after Pentecost. According to Temin (2001:1), “the economy of the early Roman Empire was primarily a market economy and [...] the parts of this economy located far from each other were not tied together as tightly as markets often are today, but they still functioned as part of a comprehensive Mediterranean market”. Similarly, Rathbone (2007:315) explains that, in the eastern Mediterranean, a combination of Roman commercial practices, mediated through banks, “created an increasingly integrated commercial world”;³⁶ and (2007:317) that the interlocking commercial networks formed through the numerous banks connected “the disparate economic corners of the Roman

36 Wallbank (1969:20, 31) refers to the Roman Empire of the first century CE as “a single economic unit”; however, Finley (1973:33) is sceptical, but concedes that the economy did function within “a single political unit”.

Empire into a global village”.³⁷ From this, we may infer that any financial crisis originating in Italy would have created a ripple effect throughout the “comprehensive Mediterranean market”, and would therefore have had a material impact in some if not all of the provincial economies.

It seems that the underlying problem concerned people’s fear of a collapse in the price of real estate. During his short reign (49 to 44 BCE), Julius Caesar introduced legislation that sought to regulate money-lending and debts, and also reduce interest rates; and Andreau (1999:104) tells us that one of the ways he attempted to do this was by establishing the maximum proportion of an aristocrat’s patrimony that could be used in extending loans. Verboven (2008:9) cites Tacitus’ report that many senators had invested more than a third of their wealth in loans,³⁸ and also comments that:

If we assume that the average senator invested only 10 per cent of his fortune in interest bearing loans, we still arrive at a total of at least 600 – but probably much more – million sesterces out on loan for senators alone. To this should be added the debt claims held by knights, local elites, business men and others. However great the uncertainty entailed in such figures, clearly the total sum of outstanding debts at any moment in the Early Empire must be reckoned in terms of many billions of sesterces [...] No matter how volatile such figures may be, no one can reasonably doubt the huge scale they indicate.

Andreau (1999:15, 27) adds that “many *faeneratores* from the aristocracy did not limit themselves to lending their own funds; they also loaned sums entrusted to them by other members of the elite [...] They themselves were part of the aristocracy, and it was, furthermore, for an elite clientele that they acted as financiers”. However, he also suggests (1999:28) that the all-pervasive economic power of the elite – namely, their “ability to control everything and profit from everything” – in fact stifled the Roman economy. Furthermore, there was sometimes a self-interested if not sinister side to these credit activities, as the elite often lent money to dependants who could not make ends meet, and who could only maintain their affluent lifestyle by getting further and further into

37 Rathbone (cited in Verboven, 2008:9) states that “Roman banking was big business”, and estimates that, in the first century CE, there were at least a thousand banks in Rome and Italy alone which, according to Verboven’s calculations (2008:10), had a collective turnover of close to 500 million sesterces.

38 It is estimated (by Rathbone) that Pliny the Younger had around 5 million sesterces out on loan.

debt.³⁹ This suited many aristocratic *faeneratores*, with their ambitions for an expanded patrimony because, as Andreau writes (1999:28), when “small-scale landowners offered their land as security, this speeded up the process which led ultimately to the concentration of real estate in the hands of the elite”.

By the reign of Tiberius, Caesar's law had fallen into disuse;⁴⁰ however, one of the magistrates decided to reapply it, which Andreau (1999:104) offers as evidence that a debt crisis had developed. He also states that legislation passed by the Senate carried a stipulation that two-thirds of sums loaned by the elite should be invested in land in Italy. The intention was to avoid a collapse in local land prices, which could then lead to further problems in the economy. Tiberius gave the senators eighteen months to comply;⁴¹ however, the measure did nothing to stop the crisis, since Tacitus (*Annals* 6.17.1) informs us that Rome was already faced with a shortage of cash, even before Caesar's law was reapplied. He attributes this liquidity problem in large part to the sale of the considerable amount of confiscated property and possessions belonging to Sejanus – along with the assets of all those who Tiberius had executed as being allies of the condemned man – since the sale of so much property confiscated by the state meant that a large amount of cash was withdrawn from the local economy and transferred into the coffers of the imperial treasury and public exchequer, thus removing vital liquidity from the public markets.⁴²

The result of the reapplied law, when added to the existing cash shortage, was disastrous; so much so that, according to Andreau (1999:105), Tiberius had to intervene:

In AD 33, the lack of cash continued to become increasingly serious. To remedy the situation, through the intermediary of ad hoc financial offices directed by senators, the Emperor himself offered interest-free loans amounting to an overall sum of 100,000,000 sesterces from his personal

39 Jones (1974:126) claims that it required 500,000 sesterces a year to enable “impoverished” noblemen to keep up their station, and refers to that amount as “a pittance”.

40 Tacitus (*Annals* 6.21.2) remarks that, by 33 CE, Caesar's law was “long obsolete because the public good is sacrificed to private interest”.

41 According to Tacitus (*Annals* 6.16), it was necessary to give the senators time to comply because “not one of them was free from guilt” of breaking Caesar's law.

42 Sejanus was executed in October of 31 CE for conspiring against Tiberius. Tacitus reports that “the great scarcity of money”, which created “a great shock to all credit”, occurred as a “consequence of the conviction of so many persons and the sale of their property, [the ‘coin’] being locked up in the imperial treasury or the public exchequer”.

fortune for the duration of three years. The borrowers were required to offer security in the form of real estate or buildings.⁴³

Andreau goes on to say that confidence was eventually restored to the local (Italian) economy. However, in the meantime, the combined effect of senatorial legislation and imperial edict would have had a significant, negative impact on the credit markets of the day, particularly in the provinces. Put simply, by fixing the maximum proportion and, in effect, reducing the amount of a Roman aristocrat's patrimony that could be used in extending "productive" loans (i.e. loans for business purposes), and simultaneously forcing the elite to concentrate their investments in Italy, this would have starved provincial credit markets of both funds and vital liquidity, thus causing the *negotiatores* – the elite's agents in the provinces – to reduce their financing activity proportionally, or perhaps even cease it altogether. In terms of this study, we are only really interested in one particular province: Judea.⁴⁴ And we can only speculate as to how this empire-wide credit vacuum might have impacted the financing of trade in the Temple-centric economy of Jerusalem; especially since, by 33 CE, Palestine had its own local economic problems, caused in part by the Herodians and local elite, as we shall now discuss.

2.5 Economic Conditions in First-century Jerusalem

Edwards (1949:116) informs us that, in the three or so decades preceding the period described by Luke in the early chapters of Acts, general economic conditions throughout the Roman Empire were quite good.

The reign of Augustus (c.27 BC to 14 AD) inaugurated a new fiscal system throughout the Roman world. Under the late republic, conditions had been very unfavorable. The succession of civil wars had led to political and economic chaos. A policy of free trade was extended. Within this

43 In fact, according to Tacitus (*Annals* 6.22.7), the loans from Tiberius had to be secured by land worth double the value of the loan.

44 Edersheim (1904:28) agrees that "the great financial crisis in the Roman Empire (in the year 33 of our era), which involved so many in bankruptcy [...] could not have been without its indirect influence even upon distant Palestine"; and the fact that the remedial loans offered by Tiberius were intended to be repaid over a three year period implies that the effects of this empire-wide credit vacuum may have lasted from 33 to 36/37 CE, which corresponds roughly to the period covered by Acts 2 to 8. See Chapter 3.5, *The time spent on 'this business'*.

vast area, economic life quickened, and there was general prosperity. Economic stability was further developed by a well regulated monetary system. Private property was safeguarded, and as a result, the accumulation of capital was encouraged. Probably never before in human history had there been so great a capital accumulation.

However, all this unprecedented accumulation of capital does not appear to have been for the benefit of the population as a whole, but primarily for the privileged elite. Edwards (1949:118) explains that in Palestine, for example, "In the cities the merchant princes erected their palaces, and in the country they bought up the plots of the small farmers and consolidated them into vast estates.⁴⁵ The small farmers became tenants or drifted to the towns and cities.⁴⁶ In either case there was a large landless class. The Jewish tenant farmer was generally in a very unsatisfactory state". He also adds that "excavation of the homes of the lower classes show pitifully low standards of living".

Interestingly, the region was famous for its agriculture and the export of goods was mostly in foodstuffs; thus Schürer et al (1979:79) report that Palestine "made her own large contribution to international trade: the products of her agriculture and industry were exported into every nation".⁴⁷ The soil in Galilee in particular was fertile; and, in Judea, according to Aristaeus, "the zeal of farmers [was] indeed remarkable".⁴⁸ This is confirmed by Josephus (*Contra Apionem* 1.60), who writes that the Jews "devote [themselves] to the cultivation of the productive country with which [they] are blessed". On the other hand, we know from Edersheim (1904), Edwards (1949), Jeremias (1969) and Schürer et al (1979) that Jerusalem also depended on foreign trade in order to satisfy the demands of its inhabitants. In fact, more than half of the articles of commerce mentioned in the Talmud and Midrash came from abroad. This demand for

45 Crossan (1999:154) cites a socio-economic model developed by Lenski (1966:228) to show that in agrarian societies the elite/governing classes (1 to 2 per cent of the population) usually appropriated 50 to 65 per cent of the agricultural productivity.

46 Oakman (1986:73) explains that "First-century Palestine evidence for a debt problem and the growth of tenancy is [...] mostly pertinent to Judea. Goodman [1982:149] has argued that the influx of wealth into Jerusalem from trade and business surrounding the Temple left much surplus capital in the hands of the pro-Roman oligarchy, and that this wealth was at hand to loan to hard-pressed smallholders and petty artisans, or to sink into land available for purchase".

47 Gross (1975:14) writes that, "despite the growing population and the excessive costs of transportation, Palestine was able to export both cereals and fruits. Some of its choice fruits were served at the Imperial tables in Rome, notwithstanding the competition of Italy, Spain and Greece, all of which yielded similar products".

48 Cited in Sanders (1992:118).

what were mainly luxury items was driven chiefly by the massive needs of the Temple and its cultus, as well as by the activities of the Herodian monarchy, whose programme of building works was both extensive and extremely costly, and whose court life was also extravagant. However, Edwards (1949:118) draws our attention to the unequal socio-economic benefits realised by this trade, which he argues was not only unbalanced and discriminatory, but also profligate to the point of being unsustainable: “it drained the nation of the food-stuffs which the masses could well have used, and supplied mainly the needs of the upper class for ornament and ostentation”.⁴⁹

According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 17.11.24), the annual tax income raised by Herod in Judea was approximately 1,600 talents of gold. However, these taxes provided minimal benefit to the country because much of it was spent outside its borders. He comments (*Antiquities* 15.9.5) on Herod “building cities after an extravagant manner and erecting temples not in Judea indeed, for that would not have been borne [...] but still he did this in the country out of our bounds, and in the cities thereof”; and also reports (*Antiquities* 16.5.4) that Herod bestowed generous subsidies on cities, “both in Syria and in Greece, and in all the places he came to in his voyages”. Thus we can see that the people, led by the elite class, had become very used to an abundance of prosperity that – leveraged through debt – fuelled an increasingly luxurious but ultimately unsustainable lifestyle, mixed with an ego-driven obsession with expensive gestures of self-aggrandisement. Thanks to the political and fiscal reforms of Augustus, the previous major Roman economic crisis was in 49 BCE. Consequently, by the time the events we are considering took place, the inhabitants of the empire (including those in the provinces) had more than enough time to be lulled into a false sense of security, economically speaking, and perhaps even came to believe that their prosperity would continue unabated; hence their apparent readiness to borrow without any concern about ever being unable to repay the debt.⁵⁰ This kind of widespread, socially-ambitious, over-spending and over-borrowing in order to “keep up with the Joneses” invariably leads to what stock market professionals euphemistically call a “correction”. However,

49 As Ste. Croix (2001:425) informs us, “The Greco-Roman world was obsessively concerned with wealth and status, and wealth was by far the most important determinant of status”. In fact, Kautsky (1982:187–197) devotes several pages to discuss the “Conspicuous Consumption and Wealth” of aristocratic empires. He writes (1982:188) that “Wealth is accumulated by aristocrats in aristocratic empires not to be saved or invested but to be displayed”.

50 For example, sometime around 35 CE, Agrippa ended up massively in debt to the Imperial Treasury, in the amount of 300,000 pieces of silver. For more concerning this episode, see Chapter 11.8, *Possible links with powerful groups in Alexandria*.

in this particular instance, it resulted in an empire-wide financial crisis, as discussed above.

This then was the economic reality of life in Jerusalem and Palestine (as well as throughout the Roman empire) on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter was preaching about Jesus but, as I have suggested, his audience of Diaspora Jews were also thinking about Joel; or, to be more precise, the promises of economic restoration found in the Book of Joel – and elsewhere in the OT. Collins (1983:14) writes that an essential part of the motivation for the Jews of the Diaspora to keep the Deuteronomic covenant was its aspects of blessings and cursings, which promised well-being to the faithful and punishment to the rebellious; and that “this understanding of the covenant persisted throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods”. Consequently, the Diaspora Jews’ knowledge and understanding of their scriptures would have combined with contemporary financial problems to ensure that the economic ramifications of Peter’s reference to Joel in the opening gambit of his Pentecost sermon, along with his subsequent call for repentance, were patently obvious and thus clearly understood. And if some of his hearers made a decision to repent and be baptised for “mundane reasons”, who can blame them? Not only were they being human, so to speak, they were also following a well-worn path of determining loyalty to a particular deity on the basis of potential economic benefit; a path taken by many of their ancestors – as well as the ancient people of the surrounding nations – for well over a millennium.

2.6 This Crooked Generation

And [Peter] solemnly and earnestly witnessed and admonished with much more continuous speaking and warned them, saying, Be saved from this crooked (perverse, wicked, unjust) generation.

Acts 2:40

Peter’s defamatory reference to a “crooked generation” would have undoubtedly created a certain amount of tension amongst a particular section of his audience. Allen (1976:104) asserts that using *σκολιός* (*skolios*, ‘crooked, wicked, perverse, untoward’) to describe that particular generation indicates that “it is ripe for the judgement associated with the Day [of Yahweh], a judgement that the citation of Psalm 110:1 in Acts 2:34f specifies as certain to be inflicted on the enemies of the exalted Christ”.

In agreement, Barrett (1994:156) states that Peter was urging his audience to seek salvation from this wicked/crooked generation “so that one no longer

shares its ways or its destiny”, thus implying divine judgement. Furthermore, according to Marshall (1980:82), “perverse or wicked generation” is “an Old Testament phrase for the people of Israel who rebelled against God in the wilderness” (Deuteronomy 32:5);⁵¹ and, by implication, the “enemies of the exalted Christ” would consist of those who, according to Peter’s earlier accusation in Acts 2:23, crucified Jesus and “put [Him] away by the hand of lawless men”. Therefore, the religious and secular authorities in the audience would have been both affronted by Peter’s accusation and also extremely uncomfortable with if not angered by the message and implicit agenda being proclaimed. Also, even though the use of the word *skolios* is usually taken in the general sense to describe moral obliquity, it has also been translated in Acts 2:40 as ‘corrupt’;⁵² and could equally be interpreted as an accusation concerning the way in which the leaders of “this crooked generation” conducted their commercial and/or political dealings. This again would have been a sensitive issue to any Sadducees in the audience, especially those who controlled the Temple cult and Temple-centric economy in Jerusalem.

Finally, this may be pure speculation; however, Wolff (1977:61) raises an interesting point when he writes that, in Joel 2:19, “The promise of ‘grain, new wine and olive oil’ points back clearly at first to the calamity described in chapter 1. But, strangely, it does not say that this will make ‘meal offerings and libations’ possible again [...] The blessing as that which makes new life possible, which was asked upon ‘meal offerings and libations’ (2:14), takes on instead the form of the pouring out of the spirit, which brings into existence a whole people of prophets (3:1) rather than ‘ministers of the altar’”. This implies that, for whatever reasons, the serving priesthood might not escape divine judgement; or, alternatively, that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would perhaps usher in a time in which cultic priests and perhaps even the cult itself would be redundant. Either way, it raises the question as to how the priestly Sadducees in first-century Jerusalem, who depended on and also prospered from the cult, would have interpreted and consequently reacted to any kind of reference to this scenario in the apostle’s message.

However, any suggestion of significant concern exhibited by the Sadducees has to be weighed against the fact that Peter’s defamatory remarks and insinuations, with their implications of divine judgement and/or justice, were made

51 Likewise, Larkin (1995:60) writes that “Peter’s use of *σκολιός* intensifies the call to repentance. The ‘wilderness generation’ experienced the judgement of God when it did not repent. So will those of the present generation if they do not answer God’s call and turn to him in repentance”.

52 In the GW, HCSB, NIV and NRSV; also ‘evil’ in the CEV, ERV and EXB; and even ‘depraved’ in the WYC.

by an “illiterate” Galilean fisherman⁵³ who, less than two months earlier, had shown that he did not have the backbone to pose any kind of genuine threat. Therefore, in the minds of the local elite, his Pentecost tirade perhaps did not need to be taken seriously. On the other hand, the economic threat that soon emerged from this new sect’s *trapeza*, which was supported by more than 3,000 “devout and God-fearing men from every country under heaven”, and eventually placed under the control of a core group of educated and well-connected Hellenist *trapezitai*, would have been impossible to ignore.

53 See Chapter 8.2, *Illiterate Hebrews and learned Hellenists*.

The Seven Hellenist ‘Bankers’

3.1 The Problem of the Hellenist Widows Re-examined

Now about this time, when the number of the disciples was greatly increasing, complaint was made by the Hellenists (the Greek-speaking Jews) against the [native] Hebrews¹ because their widows were being overlooked and neglected in the daily ministration.

Acts 6:1

I submit that, by promulgating an idealised and/or over-spiritualised representation of the primitive church's economic life,² biblical scholars have created various exegetical problems that could otherwise be resolved. For example, the traditional, charity-oriented interpretation of the commercial activity depicted in the early part of Acts has resulted in an inordinate amount of attention being focused on the so-called problem of the Hellenist widows, which in turn has led to a range of unfruitful if not irrelevant speculations: e.g. whether the reputed underlying tension between the Hebrews and Hellenists was say a “theological” problem (Horrell, 2000:138);³ a “Gentile God-fearer table-fellowship” problem (Esler, 1987:159); a sign of a growing schism between

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- 1 The traditional view, dating to Chrysostom, is that these Hellenists (*Hellenistae*, from *Hellenizo*, ‘to speak Greek’; as opposed to *Hellēn*, ‘a Greek’ by nationality) were Greek-speaking Jews, while the Hebrews were Aramaic-speaking Jews from Palestine.
 - 2 We are led to believe by various NT scholars that Luke's account of the economic life of the primitive church (e.g. Acts 2:44 and 4:32) was composed for propaganda purposes and exploited by later Christian authors for fundraising reasons, and should therefore be viewed as a statement of “the ideal” rather than fact. For example, Dibelius (1956:128) explains that Luke used the individual instances he knew of in order to compose a picture of “an ideal such as constantly appears in Greek literature since Plato”; and Mealand (1977:98) writes that, “when Jewish writers were commending the customs and practices of their religion to those for whom they wrote in Greek, it is only to be expected that they should portray members of a close knit Jewish sect as fulfilling some of the Greek Utopian ideals”. Finally, Lüdemann (1989:61) asserts that Luke was not interested in what he calls “petty details”, but in “showing that Old Testament and Greek ideals were being realized in the Jerusalem community”.
 - 3 Horrell states that “The dominant view in current scholarship is that the tension between the Hebrews and the Hellenists was theologically significant”. However, Witherington (1998:242) argues that “there is nothing in Acts 6 to suggest a significant doctrinal rift between these two groups of Christians”.

the two factions,⁴ who were supposedly separate, ideologically-defined parties within the primitive church (Baur, c.1850); or because the different factions practiced separate liturgies arising from their different languages (Bruce, 1970:151; also Hengel, 1983:14, 25–29).

On the other hand, when the alternative interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* ('to serve at the banking-tables') is applied to Acts 6:2, the episode involving the Hellenist widows can be seen to highlight nothing more complicated or sinister than a competency or workload problem: namely, the Hebrew apostles' inability to manage the volume and/or complexity of their community's burgeoning financial activities – alongside their other duties.⁵ Esler (1987:136) writes that "Few verses in the NT cause one more surprise than Acts 6:1. For after all the initial images of unity and harmony among the early Christians, even to the extent of their having had community of goods, we suddenly find Luke, without any warning, describing a dispute within the Jerusalem church". However, I suggest that this comment is unnecessarily melodramatic, since the matter can be clarified quite easily, for instance, by examining two words that will help us better understand this episode: "murmuring" and "neglected".

Also, various exegetical efforts to explain the root cause of this problem have only added to the confusion by attempting to interpret the English phrase "daily distribution" in terms of the traditional Jewish charitable activities of the time. As Watson (1996:11) informs us: "At that time there were two Jewish systems for looking after the poor: the *tamhūy* or 'poor bowl' was distributed daily to the wandering poor and consisted of food; and the *quppāh* was a weekly distribution of food and clothing to the city's poor".⁶ However, Lüdemann (1989:75) questions any possible connection between the daily 'poor bowl' and the activity alluded to in Acts 6:1 because of the incongruity arising from citing the *tamhūy* to describe a kind of welfare supposedly provided to resident

4 Watson (1996:12) argues that the complaint indicates "serious tension" between the two groups.

5 Johnson and Harrington (1992:106) explain that "the pressures of community growth [...] outstripped the administrative capabilities of the Twelve", which tallies with a possible banking scenario, since Luke's text suggests that, around the time "when the number of disciples was greatly increasing", the volume and frequency of financial transactions had also grown substantially: from the *ad hoc* distribution of funds (i.e. "from time to time" in Acts 2:45, as interpreted by Barrett, 1994:169), to the "daily ministration" mentioned in Acts 6:1.

6 Watson is citing Jeremias (1969:131); also Strack and Billerbeck (1965:643ff.). From Lüdemann (1989:74), we learn that "The *tamhūy* was distributed daily among wandering paupers and consisted of food (bread, beans and fruits, with the prescribed cup of wine at Passover). The *quppāh* was a weekly dole to the poor of the city and consisted of food and clothing". He too cites Jeremias (1969:131).

widows “which elsewhere is applied only to travelers in need”.⁷ Furthermore, if we are meant to accept that the activity described as *diakonia* in Acts 6:1 should be interpreted as some sort of first-century “soup kitchen”,⁸ we require a credible explanation for the distinct possibility that this is a role for which the Seven, who reputedly possessed the lofty attributes described in Acts 6:3, would be considered over-qualified.

As mentioned previously, Esler (1987:154–163) expends a lot of effort to argue that the problem may have been caused by “table-fellowship” between the Hellenist-Jewish Believers and Gentile God-fearers, even though there is no mention of the latter category of person until Acts 10:2–7. He suggests that the *Hebraioi* who administered the “daily distribution” would have been unhappy to serve any *Hellēnistae* who had become ritually impure by “breaking bread” with Gentile God-fearers who may have converted to the new sect, which he argues would “in all probability have led [the Hebrews] to ‘overlook’ the Hellenist widows”.⁹ But then, Barrett (1994:309) suggests that, in Luke’s Hellenist Greek, it is difficult to determine whether “the Hellenist widows here were in truth being overlooked”, or whether it was “a mere unproven allegation”.

What’s more, others have tried to equate the role of the Seven with the role of “Deacon” as it has developed over time: i.e. as liturgical assistants or assistant priests. For example, Collins (2002:54–57) speculates that the Hellenist widows were being deprived of good preaching, not just food. Finally, based on the use of *trapeza* in Didache 11.9 to denote the Eucharist table, Schille (1983) argues that the phrase *diakonein trapezais* does not refer to material care but to cultic service at the Eucharist.¹⁰ The above examples show how various NT scholars have gone to unusual lengths to explain this so-called problem in a

7 Talbert (1997:74) also argues that “The daily distribution in Acts does not correspond with either model [of first-century Jewish poor-relief]”. Hence, Cassidy writes (1987:179) that “in suggesting the image of a daily distribution of food, the RSV moved beyond what is actually indicated in the text” – likewise, the MSG, NLT and AMPC.

8 Cassidy (1987:27, n. 11) advises that, “Because of the various meanings possible for *diakonia*, there is no little difficulty in understanding what Luke intends to convey when he states that the Greek-speaking members of the community criticized the Hebrew-speaking members because their widows were being neglected in the daily *diakonia*. Interpretation is particularly complicated by the fact that *diakoneō* as an infinitive appears with *trapezais* in the next verse and then is again used as a noun in verse four”.

9 Esler (1987:198) even goes so far as to suggest that, “the scheme of social welfare put forward indirectly in Luke-Acts may, in fact, have been a Christian invention”.

10 However, Goodenough (1976:52) dismisses this idea because, as priests who administered the sacraments, we would not expect the apostles to refer to the Eucharist with the level of “contempt” implied in Acts 6:2, when they declared that it was *ou arestos* (not ‘fitting’, KJV, ASV; ‘not appropriate’, CJB, WEB; not ‘seemly’, AMPC; ‘not desirable’, NASB, NKJV; or ‘not right’, CEB, DARBY, NIV, MSG, RSV) that they should “serve at tables”.

way that accommodates an overly-narrow context of charitable and/or cultic activities within the primitive church. However, in my opinion, the amount of attention given to this so-called problem is unwarranted, to the point of becoming an unnecessary distraction.

As Esler (1987:136) tells us, in Acts 6:1, Luke is “describing a dispute within the Jerusalem church, with the Hellenists murmuring against the Hebrews because their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution”; and if we examine the words “murmuring” and “neglected”, we will understand that the so-called problem was not as serious (or as melodramatic) as we have been led to believe. For instance, Thayer explains that γογγυσμός (*gongysmos*, ‘murmuring’), is “a secret debate or displeasure not openly avowed”, whilst Vine defines it similarly as “displeasure or complaining (more privately than in public)”.¹¹ Also, both Thayer and Vine define παραθεωρέω (*paratheōreō*) as “to examine things placed beside each other, to compare” (from *para*, ‘beside’; and *theōreō*, ‘to look at’),¹² which does not correspond to the level of harshness or callousness to be inferred from the meaning of the English word “neglected”: i.e. “to be remiss in the care or treatment of something or someone; to omit, through indifference or carelessness”.¹³ Consequently, there are no real grounds to talk of any serious dissension or dispute, let alone schism. Thus, a more accurate interpretation of Acts 6:1 would be that a group of Hellenist leaders went quietly, unobtrusively and perhaps even in secret to meet with the Hebrew apostles and discuss their “concern” (a less dramatic and more appropriate word) that, *comparatively speaking*, their widows were not being properly looked after.¹⁴

Also, traditional exegetical efforts focusing on this so-called problem have invariably been based on the widespread assumption that, firstly, the size of this particular group of Hellenist widows was significant; and secondly, that every one of them was poor and in need of charity. However, Luke does not

11 For Thayer, see <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G1112&t=KJV>; and for Vine, see <http://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/ved/view.cgi?n=1872> (B-1); both accessed on October 31st 2009.

12 For Thayer, see <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3865&t=KJV>; and for Vine, see <http://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/ved/view.cgi?n=1903>; both accessed on October 31st 2009.

13 The definition of “neglected” from Dictionary.com (Unabridged); accessed on October 31st 2009.

14 Johnson and Harrington (1992:105) assert that, in this context, the note of discrimination suggested by “slighted” is more appropriate as an interpretation for the verb *paratheōreō*; however, even that might be overstating the case. Instead, I would suggest that this verse describes a situation in which, in the modern vernacular, the increasing workload of the apostles caused a few things to “fall through the cracks”. That’s all.

bother to explain their economic circumstances; and, as noted elsewhere, he does not use *πτωχός* (*ptōchos*, ‘poor’) anywhere in Acts to describe any group or individual.¹⁵ What’s more, there is no compelling support for this assumption in Luke’s references to widows in his earlier gospel. Bereft of a husband and, by implication, a source of income and protection,¹⁶ widows are often grouped with “the fatherless” as being socially and economically disadvantaged and also vulnerable – and thus (supposedly) in need of care. But then, care does not always equate with charity. For example, Christ’s warning to beware of the hypocritical scribes who “devour widows’ houses” (Luke 20:46–47)¹⁷ denotes the existence of widows who possessed valuable assets worth plundering, and were vulnerable only in the sense of their vulnerability to economic predation. Likewise, we may infer from Christ’s mention of the widow in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:3–5) that she was affluent enough to pursue justice through the courts on a regular basis – to the point where she had become a ‘nuisance’ (PHILLIPS) or ‘pest’ (*nudzha*, OJB).

In addition, we have enough circumstantial evidence to argue that Anna, the prophetess, “the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher” (Luke 2:36–37) should *not* be categorised as poor since, according to Bauckham (2002:85), she belonged to an Asherite family who returned from the Diaspora to live in Jerusalem,¹⁸ where land prices and the cost of living were high, as noted previously. Bauckham (2002:84) cites Tobit 1:9, 3:14 and 4:12–13 to argue that Asherites viewed marrying within family and/or tribe as something of a duty. Consequently, it is highly likely that Anna’s deceased husband was also an Asherite who perhaps accumulated enough wealth in the eastern part of the Diaspora to permit his widow to live in the holy (and highly expensive) capital for a number of years. In fact, Luke 2:37 suggests that she was affluent enough to have “lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four”, which would imply that, after the death of her husband, there was no financial necessity for her to remarry. If so, her personal and/or family “means” were substantial enough to support her in her widowhood for a significant amount of time.

15 In fact, according to Seccombe (2022:192), “Considering Luke’s common reputation as a champion of the cause of the poor and underprivileged, there is very little in the Gospel and Acts which relates to the actual poor”.

16 The Greek for ‘widow’ is *χήρα* (*chēra*), feminine of the adjective *chēros*, ‘bereft’; and the Hebrew *אַלְמָנָה* (*‘almānā*, ‘widow’) comes from the root *‘almān*, which is translated as ‘forsaken’ in Jeremiah 51:5.

17 Also Mark 12:40 cf. Matthew 23:14 where Christ condemns the scribes and Pharisees directly.

18 Anna’s family were supposedly from Media.

On the other hand, Luke’s gospel contains references to two widows who may or may not have been poor. Firstly, the widow at the Temple in Luke 21:2–3 is indeed described as “poor”; however, for some reason, Luke uses two different Greek words with distinctly different meanings to communicate her economic condition. In the first mention of her, he uses *πενιχρός* (*penichros*).¹⁹ The root is *πένης* (*penēs*, ‘one who works for his living’),²⁰ which – if taken literally – suggests that this particular widow was able to earn a living and, as Countryman informs us (1980:25), may even have owned a business or a shop of some sort. But then, in the following verse, when Jesus describes her, Luke uses *πτωχός* (*ptōchos*), which means that she was presumably living a “hand-to-mouth existence” and was thus truly poor at the time. Consequently, Luke’s use of *penichros* followed closely by *ptōchos* might be construed as suggesting that she was a *penēs* who had only recently become impoverished – perhaps as a result of the economic crisis in Italy and Palestine. Also, in Luke 7:12, we read about the widow of Nain, who likewise may or may not have been poor: i.e. she is not specified as poor, but was obviously bereft of both husband and son – before Jesus raised the latter from the dead. Interestingly, Luke states that “a large gathering from the town was accompanying her”, which may imply that her family was well-known and respected in the community, and may even mean that her dead husband was a key figure in the local area, but this is pure speculation. Finally, Luke’s gospel contains a reference (albeit an oblique one) to a widow who was truly poor: e.g. the widow of Zarephath, mentioned in Luke 4:26, who is depicted in the OT as being destitute and thus truly poor (1 Kings 17:10–12).

Even so, of the six passages in Luke’s gospel referring to individual widows or groups of them, we have three instances of women who are described either explicitly or implicitly as being affluent; two references describing women who may or may not have been poor; and, finally, just one (albeit oblique) reference to a woman who was truly poor. This, combined with our knowledge of the general affluence of Hellenist Jews residing in Jerusalem, allows us to challenge the traditional assumption that all of the Hellenist widows referred to in Acts 6:1 were *ptōchoi* (i.e. truly poor) and thus supposedly in need of charity, on a regular if not permanent basis. Consequently, I would argue that the

19 In fact, Luke 21:3 contains the sole usage of *penichros* in the NT.

20 From a primary root, *peno*, ‘to toil for daily subsistence’; interestingly, in the Septuagint, *penichros* only occurs twice: in LXX Exodus 22:25 in the instruction not to charge interest when lending to a fellow-Hebrew, and LXX Proverbs 29:7/36:7 discussing the rights of the “poor”.

problem highlighted in this verse could and therefore should be interpreted in a much more complex manner; even to the point of accommodating a possible banking-related issue,²¹ rather than accepting the traditional one-dimensional and problematic view: e.g. a dispute concerning the distribution of charity. After all, wealthy widows have been a source of capital for bankers to invest for centuries – in order to provide the widows with regular income. Therefore, it is not impossible that some aspect of the “murmuring” by the *Hellēnistae* was in response to problems concerning “the daily ministration” of the banking requirements of the Hellenist widows, whose need for income led them to deposit/invest funds with the primitive church *trapeza*, controlled at that time by the apostles – who supposedly did not speak Greek.²²

Furthermore, as part of my investigation into this so-called problem, I felt it would be helpful to try and ascertain how serious it may have been; and one way of doing that is by establishing the possible number of Hellenist widows involved. Watson (1996:11) writes that we should expect to find many of them resident in Jerusalem, since pious Diaspora Jews often settled in the Jewish capital in their old age, in order to be buried there.²³ However, this assertion needs to be weighed against the fact that widows with relatives living in the capital would not have been a burden on the funds of the primitive church, because we would expect their families to accept the traditional obligation to care for them, as we find depicted in Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 5:16:

If any believing woman or believing man has [relatives or persons in the household who are] widows, let him relieve them; let the church not be

21 In Thayer’s exposition of γαζοφυλάκιον (*gazophylakion*, ‘treasury, a repository of treasure, especially of public treasure’), he explains that “even the property of widows and orphans were deposited in the Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem”. Therefore, we cannot ignore the possibility that these Hellenist widows – having withdrawn their assets and banking business from the Temple treasury-bank – subsequently used the nascent sect’s banking facility for their *everyday* banking needs. In that case, the linguistic reason for the alleged problem mentioned in Acts 6:1 (as per Bruce, 1970:151; also Hengel, 1983:14, 25–29) makes perfect sense within a banking scenario, since the “illiterate” apostles’ inability to speak or write Greek (See Chapter 8.2, *Illiterate Hebrews and learned Hellenists*) could easily have created problems with their attempts to serve the *everyday* banking needs of all their Greek-speaking clients – not just the widows amongst them.

22 Of particular interest is the fact that, in the centuries-long theological debate over the charging/earning of interest, loans in which the interest charged provided income for widows (or orphans) have always been excluded from the laws prohibiting usury.

23 He is paraphrasing Haenchen (1971:260), who is not so confident, writing that “*perhaps* the number of Hellenist widows was large” (emphasis added).

burdened [with them], so that it may [be free to] assist those who are truly widows (those who are all alone and are dependent).²⁴

Marshall (1980:126) also claims that "many widows came from the Dispersion to end their days in Jerusalem. They would not be able to work to keep themselves and, if they had exhausted or given away their capital, they could be in real want". However, it is doubtful that widows would leave the city where they had lived with their late husband for many years, and where they had an existing support network of family and friends, to reside in a large city where the cost of living was significantly higher, and where they knew very few people. Conversely, Diaspora Jewesses residing in Jerusalem would not have wanted to remain in the Judean capital after their husbands died – *unless* they had a supportive family group also living there. Therefore, with respect, I submit that these assertions by Watson and Marshall constitute a clumsy attempt to legitimise the erroneously imputed seriousness and/or importance of the problem – which is yet another example of the traditional obsession with treating Luke's text as portraying an idealised state of affairs, rather than accepting a more obvious and "mundane" (i.e. commercial) explanation. That aside, in order to get a clearer picture of the seriousness of the so-called problem, I decided to create a simple, theoretical model to help determine the possible number of Hellenist widows involved, via a reverse extrapolation of modern census statistics.

For example, according to the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS), in 1987 and 2007,²⁵ the United Kingdom had an adult population of 38,155,000 and 49,466,000 respectively.²⁶ And, in those same years, figures supplied by the UK Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) show that widows over 50 years of age who received government support numbered 47,210 (1987) and 63,710 (2007) respectively.²⁷ Therefore, in the two years surveyed, the number of UK widows that would correspond more or less to our first-century

24 According to Agrell (1976:143), 1 Timothy 5:16 stresses that "the church (and thereby God) will provide only for those [widows] really alone and in need"; and if one does not "provide for one's aged relatives, one denies the faith" (1976:148).

25 1987 and 2007 were two ONS data sets readily to hand, and were deemed sufficient for my purposes.

26 In this instance, I have expanded the usual definition of adults to encompass males and females, 16 years and over.

27 All DWP statics are available online at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/statistics.asp>; in particular, this information can be found at http://83.244.183.180/100pc/wb/cnage/cat/a_carate_r_cnage_c_cat_aug08.html; accessed on May 1st 2009. I have also altered Paul's age criteria in 1 Timothy 5:9 by selecting the data for widows 50 years and over.

sample group, both in age and perceived circumstances,²⁸ represented just 0.124 per cent (1987) and 0.129 per cent (2007) of the total UK adult population. Now, if we assume an adult population for the primitive church community at the time of around 7,000 “souls”,²⁹ and use the 0.124 and 0.129 per cent figures as our benchmark, in both instances the total theoretical number of eligible women (i.e. both Hebrew *and* Hellenist widows over 50 years of age who were qualified to receive charity from the congregation) comes to just nine (or perhaps ten)³⁰ – based on Luke’s numbers, which are usually disputed as being overly-ambitious, if not fanciful.³¹ Therefore, even if we assume that *Hellenistae* were in the majority within the congregation, it means that the total number of Hellenist widows requiring charity would only have been say six or seven. Obviously, given the lower life expectancy of males in the first century CE, we could double that number to fourteen, or possibly treble it to twenty-one.³² Even so, it does put the scale of the alleged problem into proper perspective. In addition, the apostle Paul’s stipulation that only women over 60 years of age *and of good repute* should be placed on the list of widows who qualify for support from church funds would, along with Paul’s other stringent criteria,³³ no doubt limit the number of potential beneficiaries of this form

28 Obviously, there are modern widows who do not appear in these figures because they do not require government support. Likewise, it is highly likely that their first-century socio-economic equivalents would *not* have required church support either; especially if they were part of the affluent/wealthy Hellenist population living in Jerusalem.

29 According to the Lukan text, at the time the alleged problem arose, the primitive church community had grown from “120” plus “3,000 souls” (Acts 1:15 & 2:41) to “5,000” (4:4), to which “more and more there were [...] added to the Lord” (5:14), which eventually became a “multitude” (6:2) that was obviously much larger than 5,000; thus, 7,000 is reasonable.

30 Hays (2010:225) claims that the primitive church congregation had grown to 8,000 members even before the events of Acts 6:1. Even so, using the benchmark figures of 0.124 and 0.129 per cent, the total theoretical number of eligible women (i.e. both Hebrew *and* Hellenist widows over 50 years of age who qualified for charity) only comes to ten, which does not affect my argument to any degree.

31 For example, Lüdemann (1989:47) claims that “The number 3000 [in Acts 2:41] comes from Luke’s imagination and is meant to bring out the magnitude of the event”.

32 Then again, if we accept the view that Luke’s numbers are overly-ambitious, our original sample becomes smaller, and the theoretical number of possible Hellenist widows involved is proportionally smaller than my hypothetical calculations.

33 Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:9–10, “Let no one be put on the roll of widows [who are to receive church support] who is under sixty years of age or who has been the wife of more than one man; And she must have a reputation for good deeds, as one who has brought up children, who has practiced hospitality to strangers [of the brotherhood], washed the feet of the saints, helped to relieve the distressed, [and] devoted herself diligently to doing good in every way”. However, we cannot be totally confident that all these stipulations

of charity and thus decrease the possible number of Hellenist widows in this theoretical model.

Obviously, I am fully aware of the dangers of comparing ancient numbers with modern, and vice versa, since the historical situation in ancient Palestine (and antiquity in general) – particularly with regard to male mortality and the incidence of widowhood – would undeniably differ from any equivalent situation in modern western societies, owing to huge advancements in medicine and technology. Even so, I believe that this statistical exercise has been worthwhile in helping to prove my point. Therefore, taking all of the above into consideration, I would argue that the small (or small-ish) number of possible Hellenist widows involved meant that, *if* the problem highlighted in Acts 6:1 concerned the distribution of charity – and that alone – it was a minor one indeed; and, consequently, was not serious enough (on its own) to warrant the radical “management restructuring” that took place immediately after the private discussion between the Hellenist leadership and Hebrew apostles. Also, since Haenchen (1971:261) states that the two traditional forms of Jewish “poor-relief” provided in Jerusalem were administered by just *three* “relief officers” (who were able to look after all the *ptōchoi* or *indigentes*, both male and female, in a city consisting of 55,000 residents, plus up to 125,000 pilgrims), the requirement for *seven* highly-qualified *Hellēnistae* to ‘serve at tables’ (in order to look after such a small number of widows, drawn from a sect numbering 7,000 to 8,000 members) makes any theory that the role/function they were selected to fulfil was exclusively charitable in nature look decidedly suspect.³⁴

There must have been more involved.

3.2 Serving at the ‘Banking-Tables’

In order to better understand what actually may have taken place at the time, we need to more clearly define the particular function or role of the seven *Hellēnistae* who were chosen from amongst the congregation,³⁵ which has been interpreted traditionally as ‘to serve at tables’.

(written in 67 CE) were applied rigorously in Jerusalem in the immediate post-Pentecost period.

34 Especially since it has been suggested that one of them, Stephen, was an experienced banker, possibly associated with the lucrative Alexandria-Rome grain trade. See Chapter 7, *The martyrdom of Stephen*.

35 Esler (1987:141) writes that “it is widely agreed that [the Seven] were *Hellēnistae*”; e.g. according to Schneider (1980:426), “All the seven have Greek names: this makes their ‘Hellenist’ provenance clear”.

The Greek used in Acts 6:2 to explain that function is διακονεῖν τραπέζαις (*diakonein trapezais*), and I would argue that, even though most expositions of this phrase to date have focused on *diakonos*, the more important word, in terms of improving our understanding of the role, is *trapeza*. According to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:64), “*trapeza* has two special meanings: (1) a money-changer’s table, and so a bank [emphasis added]; cf. τραπεζίτης, which became the usual word for a banker; (2) a dining table. It is usually taken here in the second sense. But it is not impossible that it was intended in the first sense to cover the general financial administration of the community”.³⁶ Similarly, Thayer cites Josephus and at least five other literary sources to describe *trapeza* as “the table or stand of a money-changer, where he sits, exchanging different kinds of money for a fee (*agio*), and paying back with interest loans or deposits”.³⁷

Bruce (1970:152) is cautious, suggesting that “*perhaps* τράπεζα is used here in the financial sense” (emphasis added), citing its use in Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15 and John 2:15; while Barrett (1994:311) confirms that *trapeza* is “also used for a banker’s counter (e.g. Luke 19:23)”, but insists on restricting any possible financial interpretation to one that is exclusively charitable. He states that “it is possible though less likely that the Twelve have in mind the supervision of the financial arrangements involved in service to the poor”. Likewise, Esler (1987:143) asserts that the apostles “instituted a new system whereby the Hellenists set up a separate common fund and used this to support their own poor”. However, this speculation is challenged by Johnson and Harrington (1992:110) who ask that, “If we are to conclude from the Greek names of the seven that they were to take over the care of the ‘Hellenist’ widows, who would look after the ‘Hebrew’ widows once the apostles had left their station?” Plus, in their reference to “the poor”, both Barrett and Esler seem to have ignored the fact that Luke does not use *ptōchos* anywhere in the text of Acts.³⁸

In Acts 6:2, *trapeza* appears in the plural dative case: τραπέζαις (*trapezais*); and there are several instances where this case occurs in Greek literature in a banking-related context: e.g. Demosthenes 19.114, where Philocrates is said to be trading his gold openly ‘at the bankers’ (trans. by C. A. and J. H. Vince, 1926), and Isokratēs 17.2, where an individual is complaining about certain

36 Nida and Louw (1992:57.230) suggest that *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 can be translated *idiomatically* as “to be responsible for the financial aspects of an enterprise – ‘to handle finances’”.

37 For Thayer, see <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5132&t=KJV>; accessed on October 31st 2009.

38 For a detailed explanation of the different words that have been used in ancient Greek and Latin literature to describe “the poor”, see Chapter 8.3, *No needy person among them*.

advantages enjoyed by the managers ‘of banks’ (trans. by George Norlin, 1980); also, Plutarch’s *De garrulitate*, Chapter 21, to describe people who are going ‘among the bankers’ (trans. by William Goodwin, 1874), or who are ‘at the bank’ (trans. by W. C. Helmbold, 1939). Likewise, the singular dative case, τραπεζῇ (*trapezē*), is rendered ‘at the bank’ in *Lysias* 9.6 (trans. by W. R. M. Lamb, 1930); also ‘in the bank’ in Demosthenes 27.11 & 48.12 (trans. by A. T. Murray, 1939); plus ‘at the banking-table’ in Isokratēs 17.12 (trans. by George Norlin, 1980). Thus, ‘to serve at the banking-tables’ and ‘to serve in the bank’ are plausible renderings for *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2.

It is also noteworthy that, in the two references in the Synoptic gospels regarding the parable of the entrusted money, *trapeza* is given a banking interpretation. For example, in the parable of the minas (Luke 19:23), τράπεζαν (*trapezan*) is translated as ‘in a bank’ (the NIV renders it as ‘on deposit’, while the MSG has ‘invest [...] in securities’); and in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:27), τραπεζίταις (*trapezitais*) is rendered as ‘with the bankers’ (e.g. ASV, AMPC, CEB, CJB, ESV, PHILLIPS, MSG and RSV), or ‘in the bank’ (e.g. CEV and NASB). Also, in three other NT verses where *trapeza* is used (Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15 and John 2:15), it refers specifically to a table used by money-changers: τραπεζὰς τῶν κολλυβιστῶν (*trapezas tōn kollybistōn*).³⁹ Furthermore, at the time Luke was writing, *trapeza* had been used – and thus understood – in a distinctly commercial context throughout the Greco-Roman world for around 400 years;⁴⁰ and, according to Davies (2002:72), was associated with the function of a “minor banker”.⁴¹ In support, we have Cohen’s statement (1997:63–64) that, in the fourth century BCE, “In popular parlance, and even in legal documents, the banking business [...] was referred to and recognized under the term *trapeza*”.⁴²

In addition, Cohen (1997:27–28) asserts that there is significant literary evidence of the operation of what he calls “trapezitic businesses” in the numerous references that describe the provision of credit (for commercial loans) by

39 John 2:15 reads differently, in that Jesus “poured out the changer’s money, and overthrew the tables”. However, this reference is equivalent to “the money-changer’s tables”.

40 For example, see Plato, *Apologia Sōkratous* 17c and *Lysias* 9.6, *For the Soldier* (5th to 4th century BCE); Isokratēs 17.2 and also Demosthenes 33.10, 33.24, 33.9 and 36.6 (4th century BCE); *Papyrus Elephantine* 27.22 (223/2 BCE); *Papyrus Enteuchis* 38.1 (221 BCE); *Tebtunis Papyrus* 27.70 (118 BCE); IG22.2336.180 (1st century BCE); *Oxyrhynchus papyri* 2.305 and 4.835 (1st century CE); all cited in Thayer’s Lexicon.

41 However, the various references to the significant wealth of Athenian bankers (i.e. *trapezitai*), such as Pasiōn and his successor, Phormiōn, suggest that Davies is not entirely correct in his use of the description “minor”.

42 As an early example, Cohen (1997: 63–64, n. 7) quotes an extract from Demosthenes 45.31, concerning the matter of the lease on Pasiōn’s bank: “ΜΙΣΘΩΣΙΣ – κατὰ τὰδε ἐμίσθωσε Πασίων τράπεζαν Φορμίῳν”.

bankers in fourth-century Athens, to be found within the corpus of thirty-three speeches by Demosthenes, where at least 130 separate extensions of credit can be identified; and also in relevant speeches by Isokratēs, as well as a variety of literary, epigraphic, numismatic and papyrological sources from classical Greek antiquity that identify perhaps 1,000 separate loan transactions.⁴³ He also comments (1997:31) on how remarkable it is, given the relatively small population of fourth-century Athens and the highly fragmentary nature of the evidence, that more than thirty bankers from this period alone are known by name and profession: i.e. as *trapezitai*.⁴⁴

However, as mentioned previously, the rationale for a banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 does not rely on linguistic arguments alone. By the first century CE, banking operations had been an integral component of the economic activities of religious sects for well over three millennia.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is likely that the new sect of Jesus-Believers would also have chosen to operate their own banking facility. What's more, it is possible that their decision to do so would have been heavily influenced by the precedent set by the Essenes who, around 185 years prior to Pentecost, ceased to provide offerings and/or income for the Temple in Jerusalem – which implies that they also removed their banking business, motivated by similar anti-Sadducee sentiments that are well attested.⁴⁶ Hence, we may infer from both the historical and religious context of this period that the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers would also have chosen to establish their own, separate, treasury-banking operation.

Thus, we have a combination of historical and religious/sectarian precedents to reinforce the linguistic argument, and so make 'banking-table' or 'bank' a more appropriate interpretation for *trapeza* in Acts 6:2, rather than the more prosaic word 'table'. I therefore recommend adoption of this alternative, commercial interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* to help us understand that the primitive church had at its heart a widely-recognised banking function, whose financial activities would perhaps not have been as limited in scope as those of a modern deposit and loan bank.⁴⁷ Consequently, the seven Hellenists – who

43 Cohen cites Millett's claim (1983:43) to have catalogued almost 900 such transactions "from the whole of classical Greece".

44 In fact, according to Davies (2002:73–74), the available records of Greek banking are only the tip of the iceberg. Much of Greek business was informal and spontaneous, with the private banker employing the minimum of written accounts.

45 See Chapter 4.2, *The temple-based origins of banking*.

46 See Chapter 6.5, *Essene precedent and Sadducee paranoia*.

47 See Chapter 10, *The primitive church 'trapeza': a theoretical model*.

Chrysostom claims “were neither presbyters nor deacons”⁴⁸ – were chosen by “the multitude” and appointed by the Twelve to fulfil the role of *trapezitai*: i.e. bankers to the growing sect community. Once this interpretation is adopted, it opens up possible solutions to various exegetical issues within the Lukan text that hitherto have remained unresolved.

For example, Esler (1987:141) writes that “one feature of [the account in Acts 6:1–5] in particular arouses an immediate suspicion as to its accuracy: the fact that after this assembly there is never any mention made of the Seven being engaged in such a ministry”. Johnson and Harrington (1992:111) raise the same issue, stating that “The seven were selected precisely to be ‘in charge of this responsibility’ of the daily distribution (6:3). But although the entire narrative from this point until the end of chapter 8 is devoted to two of the seven (Stephen and Philip), neither of them has the slightest connection with ‘the service of the tables’ [...] The problem of this passage is that there is no obvious connection between the purported role of the seven and the actual function”.⁴⁹ However, I would suggest that there is no problem with this passage; and the lack of any later mention in the text concerning the function described traditionally as ‘to serve at tables’, as well as the lack of any mention of the Seven performing this role, can be easily explained. For instance, we have a highly plausible explanation from Cohen (1997:20–21) who, citing orations by Demosthenes and Isokratēs, explains that, in the normal day-to-day operational activities of an ancient *trapeza*, we rarely if ever find the leading *trapezitai* actually ‘serving at tables’, but instead they are out and about ‘in the city’, interacting with officials and important clients, and involved in credit and other financial arrangements at a much higher level.⁵⁰ Therefore, if the daily *diakonia* in Acts 6:2 involved banking activity, and not merely charity, the answer to the conundrum posed by Esler, Johnson and Harrington becomes apparent.

Finally, it would be helpful to comment on the author of Acts and his intended readership. Bruce (1970:27) argues that, “In general, we may describe Luke’s style as good Hellenist Greek, somewhat more literary than the Greek of most NT writers”. He also asserts that Luke has a much fuller vocabulary than the other NT writers. Conzelmann (1987:xxxv) agrees that “Elements of

48 Cited in Barrett (1994:304). Bruce (1970:152) also reminds us that the Seven are not called *διάκονοι* (*diakonoī*), though of course they were *diakonoī* in the ordinary sense of ‘servants’; and Marshall (1980: 126) states that “It is noteworthy that Luke does not refer to the Seven as deacons; their task had no formal name”.

49 We also have Weiser’s comment (1981:171) that “Stephen is not depicted ‘serving at tables’ but in public”.

50 As explained in Chapter 3.3, *Beyond the tables*.

literary Greek are more pronounced in [Luke's] work than elsewhere in the New Testament (with the exception of Hebrews)"; also that "The vocabulary is considerable and exhibits points of contact with Josephus, Plutarch, Lucian, and most of all with the LXX". Furthermore, according to Esler (1987:184), "the high literary style of parts of Luke-Acts, especially of the prologue (Luke 1:1–4) and of the sea voyage and shipwreck description in Acts 27, implies that the author came from the upper segment of Greco-Roman society".⁵¹ He also suggests that it is "unlikely that Luke was the only member of his community with his background; there were, presumably, others capable of savouring his recourse to excellent Greek". In addition, Marshall (1980:18) writes that, "The language and style of Luke stand out in the New Testament and show that he was perhaps the most conscious of all its writers that he was writing literature for an educated audience".

I therefore suggest that Luke's "higher circle of readers", as Dibelius (1956:103) calls them,⁵² would have been quite knowledgeable and astute when it came to contemporary political and economic matters; and would have fully understood the economic and political background, as well as the implications, of the details in his narrative – both at the local and international level. We should also take into consideration what Read-Heimerdinger (1998:29) refers to as the "Jewish exegetical framework" of Acts. She advises that "It is important to understand that a large part of such methods depends on silent comment. This comment is achieved by an awareness shared by the narrator and his audience of accepted practices that constitute a common ground between them". Therefore, when Luke used *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 to describe the function or role undertaken by the Seven, on the basis of "accepted practice" (i.e. not only how he had used the word *trapeza* in his earlier gospel account, but also how it had been used throughout the Greco-Roman world for something like four centuries), his educated, Hellenist-Jewish audience would have understood exactly what he meant.

51 Jones (1966:285) informs us that the literary education available in Hellenistic cities was "largely inaccessible to the lower orders".

52 According to Dibelius (1956:103), "The fact that the book [of Acts] was destined for a 'higher circle' of readers comes out in a number of details. The stylised description of Athens, with its carefully weighted words, which introduces Paul's Areopagus speech, the speech and trial scenes interwoven with uniform, apologetic ideas (Acts 22–26), or the placing of the Pentecost story, by means of the catalogue of nations, in its setting of world evangelism – who but the cultured reader could understand the full significance of all of this?"

3.3 Beyond the Tables

In any investigation of the potential economic, political and/or social impact of a *trapeza* operating within the primitive church community, we must exercise care not to confuse form and function with functionary. Nor should we be unduly influenced by the etymological origins of the word *trapeza*: a smallish, portable and somewhat flimsy, foot-footed table.⁵³

Einzig (1948:225), Homer (1963:33), Orsingher (1967:viii–ix) and Davies (2002:61–63) all state that money was first officially coined in Lydia (in modern day Anatolia) in the seventh century BCE, during the reign of King Cyges; and the coins were reputedly made of electrum.⁵⁴ Chachi (2005:6) informs us that banking operations emerged in Greece “because certain traders soon began to specialise in the evaluation and exchange of coins made from precious metals in various sizes and weights”.⁵⁵ As we know, this activity was conducted by men “serving at tables”, which conjures up prosaic images of low-level functionaries executing a series of mundane transactions involving foreign coins – which, again, is hardly worthy of the seven men with the qualifications and attributes listed in Acts 6:3; not to mention the description of Stephen a few verses later in verses 8 and 10. But then, as Cohen (1997:20–21) explains in some detail, in the available literature of fourth-century Athens, we never actually find high-ranking *trapezitai* in such pedestrian circumstances; namely, “serving at tables”. He writes, for example, that:

Kallippos, the representative of the Hērakleōtes in Athens, seeks out the banker Pasiōn; he finds him not ‘at the table’, but ‘in the city’ (Demosthenes 52.8). To obtain the deposit information requested by Kallippos, Pasiōn suggests that they go to the bank proper at the Piraeus harbor. In fact, when Kallippos had been ‘at the bank’ some time earlier, he found there not the banker himself, but his chief functionary, Phormiōn. Already early in the fourth century, it is the banking assistant (and alleged slave), Kittos, who is ‘seated at the table’ handling large sums of currency (Isokratēs 17.12). The bank owner is pictured in Isokratēs’ presentation as personally and intimately involved in trapezitic business, but on a level sharply removed from currency exchange: providing

53 From τέσσαρες (*tessares*, ‘four’) and πεζή (*pezē*, ‘on foot’).

54 The claim by Herodotus (*Histories* 94) that the Lydians were the first to coin in gold and silver has been construed as referring to coinage in electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver, with trace elements of copper and other metals. However, it could also mean that the Lydians were the first to coin the two precious metals separately.

55 Chachi cites Orsingher (1967:3).

securities, negotiating claims, offering guarantees and personal advice to important customers.⁵⁶

Cohen goes on to write that “We see bankers in a variety of settings – at home, at the assembly, at the harbour, in the temples, in transit between the civic centre (*agora*) and the harbour. But we never see the bank owners or operators themselves personally engaged in the changing of money” – and thus “serving at tables”. As mentioned previously, this comment provides a plausible explanation as to why, after Acts 6:5, there is no description of Stephen, the head *trapezitēs* (or Philip for that matter), actually “serving at tables”; but instead, Stephen is reported as being out amongst the people working “great wonders and signs” (6:8) – amongst other things, I would suggest.

3.4 The Basis of a ‘Trapezitic Business’: Other People’s Money

In fourth-century Athens, bankers like Pasiōn were so extraordinarily wealthy, they were able to make a huge impact on local society through the power and influence derived from their personal wealth;⁵⁷ and throughout the modern era we find similar occurrences of wealthy bankers using their largesse to exert influence.⁵⁸ Because of this, any discussion of *trapezitai* operating in the primitive church runs the risk of being derailed by a debate over whether or not the seven Hellenists listed in Acts 6:5 were wealthy.

For reasons given previously, we can assert with some certainty that many Hellenist-Jews living in Jerusalem possessed substantial wealth; or at least enough wealth to be able to live in the capital city, where land prices and the cost of living were high. Consequently, we can speculate that the primitive church congregation contained a number of wealthy Hellenist-Jews, but we

56 Bogaert (1966, in Seager, 1967:379) dates the origins of Greek money-changers to the sixth century BCE, and suggests that the transition to bankers (*trapezitai*) was accomplished by the beginning of the fourth century at the latest. Also, from Cohen (1997:19) we learn that, “Although the bankers continued in the fourth century to provide exchange facilities, this was not the dominant aspect of their business: deposit and lending activities were”. This is evident, he asserts (1997:21), by the fact that, “in the entire corpus of surviving banking disputes and litigation, not one case involves issues arising from money-changing activities”.

57 Similarly, Andreau (1999:49) writes that, “in the second century BC and at the beginning of the first century, particularly in Delos and the rest of the Greek world, but also in Italy and in Rome itself, certain *trapezitai* and *argentarii* were in possession of considerable fortunes, which sometimes allowed them to make a great show of their generosity”.

58 For example, the Rothschilds in Europe, and John Pierpont Morgan in the United States.

cannot state categorically that the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*, led by Stephen, were wealthy men in their own right. However, wealthy or not, in practical terms the point may in fact be irrelevant. According to Cohen (1997:183–184), “In the unregulated Athenian banking community, there was no requirement that bankers possess even a minimum of personal money [...] Clients’ demands and the proprietor’s skills and desires alone determined the amount of the proprietor’s funds, if any, required to operate a *trapeza*”. Cohen (1997:66–67) further claims that “The Athenian bank’s business value rested almost entirely upon its ‘human assets’ [...] Any physical items pertaining to the bank were entirely ancillary, and were immaterial in comparison to the profit-producing potential of the banker’s money-raising credibility and money-management skills,⁵⁹ network of relationships, and high credibility, the essence of the banking ‘operation’ (*ergasia*). The banker’s own money was not essential: the banking business, in Demosthenes’ own words, produced revenues ‘from other people’s money’.”⁶⁰

Furthermore, Ricardo (1816) argues that a bank would never prosper if it obtained no other profits but those as a business derived from the employment of its own capital. The real advantage of a bank to the community it serves, he asserts, commences only when it employs the capital of others.⁶¹ Likewise, Sirri and Tufano (1995:88) explain that, “Without pooling aggregate wealth to fund enterprises, firm size would be constrained by the wealth under the control of a single household. Pooling relieves society of this limitation, bridging firms’ capital needs and households’ investing needs”. Thus, in order to function as *trapezitai*, the seven Hellenists listed in Acts 6:5 did not need to possess wealth; they only needed to have access to it.⁶² Interestingly, Cohen’s

59 Demosthenes 36.57 alludes to the enormous sums that could be raised by bankers from third parties: “Depositions have been read to you, men of Athens, showing that the defendant [Phormio] has supplied you with funds in excess of the whole amount that he or anybody else possesses; but Phormio has credit with those who know him for so great an amount and for far larger sums, and through this he is of service both to himself and to you” (trans. by A. T. Murray, 1939).

60 In Demosthenes 36.11, banking is described as ἐργασία προσόδους ἔχουσα ἐπικινδύνους ἀπὸ χρημάτων ἀλλοτρίων, “an enterprise yielding a hazardous revenue from money that belongs to others” (trans. by A. T. Murray, 1939).

61 Mentioned in the entry for “Banks and Banking” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911:335. Interestingly, Bogaert (1968) makes a clear distinction between bankers, who lend other people’s money, and capitalists, who use their own capital to help finance other people’s ventures.

62 This should not have been a problem for the Hellenist *trapezitai*, as we are informed by Goodman (1982:149) that the influx of wealth from trade and business surrounding the Temple in Jerusalem created a great deal of surplus capital that was used for extending credit.

reference to the banker's network of relationships, high credibility, and his prestige as a professional, resonates to some extent with the list of personal attributes stipulated by the apostles in Acts 6:3 (i.e. "men of good and attested character and repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom") – attributes that, as argued elsewhere, would be considered overkill for the supervision of what traditional exegesis suggests was essentially a first-century "soup kitchen".

3.5 The Time Spent on 'This Business'

In the text of Acts 2 to 6, we are told how the primitive church community grew in numerical terms. However, the question remains as to how long it took for the congregation to reach the larger numbers claimed by Luke;⁶³ and thus how much time the Hebrew apostles and Hellenist *trapezitai* had to build and develop 'this business' (*chreia* in Acts 6:3). Such information would then assist us in determining how much of a threat this commercial activity may have posed to the Sadducee elite who controlled the Temple treasury-bank and Temple-centric economy in Jerusalem.

If we rely on Humphreys and Waddington's calculations (1983:744 and 1992:334–339) to determine the relevant years in which the 14th of Nisan fell on a Friday, we can fix the crucifixion of Christ and thus the original Day of Pentecost in either 30 or 33 CE.⁶⁴ We may then accept that the operation of the primitive church *trapeza* commenced under the control of the apostles in either of those years. Interestingly, Humphreys and Waddington argue in some detail (1983:743 and 1992:331) that "The evidence points to Friday 3 April 33 AD as the date when Jesus died".⁶⁵ Also, according to Fotheringham (1934:160–161),

63 As mentioned previously, some scholars doubt the authenticity of Luke's numbers and deem them overly-ambitious. However, I suggest that the presence of a *trapeza* operating successfully within the community of Jesus-Believers would have provided a powerful engine for economic growth that could easily have helped to achieve the kind of numerical growth described in the Lukan text.

64 Humphreys and Waddington (1992:339) argue that "there is a striking unanimity from all sources that the Crucifixion was on Nisan 14 and consequently the only two plausible years for the Crucifixion are AD 30 and AD 33".

65 Alongside their astronomical calculations, Humphreys and Waddington (1983:744) also use the commencement of Jesus' ministry to help fix the Crucifixion date. They argue that "The earliest possible time at which Jesus can have begun His ministry is autumn AD 28 while John's gospel records three different Passovers occurring within the ministry (including that at the Crucifixion). If this evidence is accepted, AD 30 cannot be the Crucifixion year and AD 33 is the only possibility". For support, they cite Edwards, O., *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 29 (1982). They also cite (1992:337–338) Luke 3:12, which

Luke’s reference to darkness “enveloping the whole land” (Luke 23:44–45) provides further support for fixing the crucifixion in 33 CE.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record a darkness over the whole land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, and the best authorities for the text of St Luke add the explanation τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλείποντος, ‘the sun being eclipsed’. Ἐκλείπειν is a technical term, and when used of the sun or moon always means ‘to be eclipsed’.⁶⁶ Now the darkness was certainly not caused by an eclipse of the sun, for on the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the lunar month the moon is at or near the full, and solar eclipses can occur only at new moon.

However, Humphreys and Waddington (1992:349) contend that τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλείποντος in Luke 23:45 can also be translated as “the sun failed”, which, according to its usage in the Syballine Oracles, describes a dust storm, rather than a solar eclipse.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, all things considered, it would appear that Luke was describing a lunar eclipse; and Fotheringham insists that the only occurrence of a lunar eclipse in either 30 or 33 CE “was on the evening of Friday April 3 in the year 33: i.e. on the very evening of the Crucifixion”.⁶⁸ In addition, we find support from the NT and also historical sources for fixing the crucifixion in 33 CE, based on the events and dates behind the thinly-veiled threat against Pilate in John 19:12:

Upon this, Pilate was anxious to release [Jesus], but the Jews kept shrieking, If you release this Man, *you are no friend of Caesar* (emphasis added).

states that John the Baptist commenced his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius: 29 CE, according to the Julian calendar; thus implying that the baptism of Christ and commencement of His three-year or so ministry occurred sometime after that – which again fixes the year of the Crucifixion as 33 CE. Likewise, Maier (1968:8) puts forward an argument that he claims “strongly supports evidence in favor of 33 AD”. Also, Fotheringham (1934:161) asserts that the date April 3rd in 33 CE offers fewer difficulties than any other suggestion. However, Smallwood (1970:92) is not so positive, contending that “The weight of other evidence seems to favour 33 slightly, but it is far from conclusive”.

66 According to Humphreys and Waddington (1992:348), τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλείποντος is “the standard technical description of a solar eclipse”.

67 See also Chapter 2.1, *Hearing about Jesus, but thinking about Joel*.

68 Humphreys and Waddington (1992:350) maintain that, as well as the astronomical evidence, there are three textual references to confirm the existence of a lunar eclipse on the day of the Crucifixion (i.e. Friday, April 3rd 33 CE): the Book of Acts, the “Report of Pilate” (an NT apocryphal fragment) and the writings of Cyril of Alexandria (412 CE).

Maier (1968:12) explains that the phrase *amici Caesaris*, ‘friend of Caesar’, was a formal designation of rank bestowed upon the governing circle of the Roman inner elite “whose membership was reserved for senators and those equestrians, high in government, who were specifically called to this status. Loss of the rank *amici Caesaris* led to political and social ostracism, even suicide”.⁶⁹ Also, in the wake of the condemnation and execution of the all-powerful Sejanus (on 18th October, 31 CE), anyone who was not a loyal ally or “friend” of Tiberius was liable to experience a similar fate. Doig (1990) cites the report in Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.6.5) that Pilate was appointed by Tiberius in 26 CE, and contends that he would therefore not be linked to Sejanus. But Maier (1968:8) disagrees, arguing that “It seems more than probable that in 26 AD, Pontius Pilate was nominated to succeed Valerius Gratus as *praefectus Iudaeae* by L. Aelius Sejanus”.⁷⁰ However, the point concerning who actually appointed Pilate is perhaps not germane because, after Tiberius retired to Capri in 26 CE (in the same year as Pilate’s appointment), the power of Sejanus in Rome grew to the point where, according to Dio Cassius (*Roman History* LVIII 41), “the senators and the rest looked up to him as if he were actually emperor and held Tiberius in slight esteem”.

Therefore, even if Tiberius did appoint Pilate in 26 CE, it is rather unlikely that, for the ensuing five years, from Pilate’s appointment to the death of Sejanus in late 31 CE, Tiberius (who had virtually retired from public life and all responsibilities of government)⁷¹ would have bothered himself with the administration of a far-off and, in Roman eyes, seemingly unimportant province. As a consequence, for those first five years in office, Pilate would have reported to Sejanus. Furthermore, Maier (1968:9) argues that “Philo identifies Sejanus as a dedicated anti-Semite [who] wished to do away with the

69 See Suetonius, *Tiberius*, xlv; also Bammel (1952:206–210; cited in Maier (1968:12, n. 44).

70 The lack of certainty as to who appointed Pilate stems from Josephus’ account of the matter. He writes in *Antiquities* 18.1.2 that, after he became emperor, Tiberius “sent Valerius Gratus to be procurator of Judea”, but merely states that, eleven years later, “Pontius Pilate came as his successor”, without specifying the name of the person who made the appointment, which Maier uses to argue that “it seems more than probable” he was appointed by Sejanus. On the other hand, in *Antiquities* 18.6.5, Josephus explains that, even though Tiberius “was emperor twenty-two years, he sent in all but two procurators to govern the nation of the Jews, Gratus, and his successor in the government, Pilate”, which Doig uses as the basis of his claim that Pilate was appointed by Tiberius.

71 According to Maier (1968:10, n. 29), “Tiberius retired to Campania and Capri in 26 A.D., leaving the affairs of government largely in the hands of Sejanus”. He cites Tacitus (*Annals* 4:41, 57) and Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61).

nation".⁷² He therefore speculates that Pilate's blatantly anti-Jewish actions stemmed from his enthusiastic implementation of Sejanian policy in Palestine. Undoubtedly, this and other links to Sejanus would have increased the potency of any threat inherent in the accusation that Pilate was *not* "a friend of Caesar" (i.e. Tiberius), as per John 19:12.

After the execution of Sejanus, Tiberius moved quickly against all other possible threats; and so "it was that neither Tiberius spared anyone, but employed all the citizens without exception against one another, nor, for that matter, could anybody rely upon the loyalty of any friend; but the guilty and the innocent, the timorous and the fearless, stood on the same footing when face to face with the inquiry into the charges involving the acts of Sejanus" (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LVIII 16:4–6; also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61–62).⁷³ And although Doig (1990) asserts that the killings stopped in 32 CE, by the 14th of Nisan (April 3rd of 33 CE), the extensive fear generated by Tiberius' political purge, and threat of recrimination and retribution regarding who was or was not "a friend of Caesar", could still have carried a lot of weight throughout the empire – especially since Tiberius had returned to Rome and was still alive;⁷⁴ and particularly in the case of Pilate, who had been the political minion of Sejanus for at least five years.

In support, Maier (1968:11) argues that "ever since late in 31, when news reached Palestine of the fall of his patron, Sejanus, Pilate had doubtless been living under the political sword of Damocles, wondering if the 'Tiberian terror' in uprooting supporters of the fallen minister and murderer of the princeps' son Drusus would extend to the provinces". All this leads him to conclude (1968:9) that, "if Good Friday were on April 7, 30 AD, the [Jews'] threat of appealing to Tiberius would indeed have been impotent and empty; at that time, Sejanus was approaching his greatest successes in Rome". Thus, we can have some confidence in using the implied threat of John 19:12 to help fix the date of the crucifixion event within the historical context of Tiberius'

72 See Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium*, xxiv, 159–161; also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii, 5; cited in Maier (1968:9).

73 According to the report by Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61:2), "Not a day passed without an execution, not even those that were sacred and holy; for he put some to death even on New Year's day. Many were accused and condemned with their children and even by their children. The relatives of the victims were forbidden to mourn for them. Special rewards were voted the accusers and sometimes even the witnesses. The word of no informer was doubted".

74 Tiberius died on March 16th 37 CE.

engineering of the execution of Sejanus and its aftermath, which also means that the Day of Pentecost took place in 33 CE.⁷⁵

Consequently, if it is correct that Stephen was stoned during the period when there was no Roman procurator in Jerusalem (i.e. the interregnum, after Pilate had been recalled to answer charges in front of Tiberius),⁷⁶ this puts the execution of Stephen and consequent cessation of the primitive church banking operations (in Jerusalem) somewhere between the end of 36 and early 37 CE. Interestingly, Doig (1990) supports this particular dating with his argument that Pilate's superior, Lucius Vitellus, the Legate of Syria, visited Jerusalem for the first time during the Passover festival on 19th April 37 CE, where, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.4.13), he was "magnificently received" by the local populace "for ridding them of the hated Pilate" – and also for cancelling taxes on the purchase and sale of fruit, no doubt.

Therefore, I would suggest that the primitive church *trapeza*, controlled first by the Hebrew apostles and then by the Hellenist *trapezitai*, was operating in the area of the Temple known as Solomon's porch for a period of somewhere between three and three and a half years. This would have been plenty of time to develop "this business" (*chreia*) into a thriving enterprise that posed a serious threat to the economic powerbase of the ruling class in Jerusalem; a threat that, in the minds of the Sadducee elite, needed to be dealt with in a decisive manner. Other arguments exist to suggest that the gap between these pivotal events was longer: e.g. five or more years (Turner, 1898:421–423; in Bruce, 1990:186).⁷⁷ However, I believe that we may dismiss them on the basis that (a) it would mean that Stephen's execution occurred more than 18 months *after* the interregnum, and the presence of the new procurator would have prevented the Sanhedrin and mob from taking what, under Roman law, was

75 Maier (1968:13) argues that fixing the date of the Crucifixion at April 3rd 33 CE "is the only option in the vast scholarly literature on this much altercated question which satisfies all the following requirements: (1) it allows 'the fifteen years of Tiberius' to be interpreted in its proper Roman setting and sense, rather than requiring resort to an unlikely 'co-regency' dating system; (2) at the same time, it allows also for the requisite three or four Passovers in Jesus' public ministry which are required by the Fourth Gospel; (3) it is the only date which accounts for Pilate's attitude on Good Friday and makes sense of the prosecution's threat in John 19:12; (4) it is a correct equation, astronomically and calendrically, of Friday, Nisan 14; and (5) it is the only date which integrates successfully with all appropriate chronological clues in the Gospel sources, without requiring heavy scholarly manipulation".

76 See Chapter 7, *The martyrdom of Stephen*.

77 Bruce cites Turner's claim that the progress report in Acts 6:7 is one of six "panels" that divide Acts into periods of an average of five years each, which does not tally with the historic record as above.

an illegal action;⁷⁸ and (b) it is unlikely that the Sadducee elite would have allowed the economic threat from the new sect’s *trapeza* to increase in scope and strength for that length of time – especially as its runaway success was taking place literally on their “front porch”, so to speak.

3.6 Banking as an Economic and Social Catalyst

The appearance of deposit banks (in mainland Greece in the fifth century BC, and in Rome at the end of the fourth century BC) is thus an event of considerable importance. It marks a turning point in the economic and social evolution of ancient societies.

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Bankers have historically enjoyed high esteem and influence in business, politics and also social circles. For evidence of this in fourth-century Athens, Cohen (1997:25, n. 108) cites the incident recorded in Isokratēs 17.2, when “an individual litigating against a *trapezitēs* complains to the jurors of his disadvantage in having a banker as an adversary: the *trapezitai* had wide networks of relationships, disposed of considerable monies, and were accorded unquestionable credibility”.

However, with their traditional albeit recently tarnished reputation for conservatism and probity,⁷⁹ bankers would rarely if ever be thought of as social catalysts, let alone being capable of doing anything that could be regarded as revolutionary. Nevertheless, such attributes are claimed by Cohen (1997:7, 224) when he asserts that the *trapezitai* of ancient Athens transformed both the economy and society of their day. Prior to the advent of private banks in the fourth century BCE, Athens is described by Cohen (1997:207) as having an “embedded” economy in which “all financial dealings would be handled entirely through socio-political relationships (i.e. hierarchical dependencies, extended kinship arrangements, and similar connections)”. However, things changed radically from the fourth century onwards when the Athenian economy started to function via “a market process in which unrelated individuals, often in the city only transiently, sometimes even operating from abroad, sought monetary profit through commercial exchange”.⁸⁰ In this way, the

78 See Chapter 7, *The martyrdom of Stephen*.

79 Is it fair to say that this traditional reputation of bankers has been well and truly sullied by the excesses and avarice that led to the global financial crisis of 2008 and beyond.

80 See Cohen (1997:4).

activities of extremely powerful bankers like Pasiōn, a foreigner and former slave,⁸¹ helped to change the economic and social landscape of the day, as Cohen further explains (1997:7):

Beyond the exchange of currency [...] these money changers (called *trapezitai*) provided loans, accepted deposits, and served as intermediaries in facilitating commerce, becoming what we would term 'bankers'. Since the provision of these functions originated not in traditional familial, social or political relationships, but in the isolated transactions of a business environment, *the trapeza further detached the new economy from the social fabric of traditional society* (emphasis added). Because of its commercial genesis, autonomous of traditional society, operation at Athens of a trapezitic business (a 'bank') was open to those who had no prior stake in the pre-existing fabric of relationships – to non-aristocrats, non-Athenians, even slaves. These activities in turn created new personal and familial relations, further transforming both society and the economy.

This information is helpful in understanding why the Seven Hellenist *trapezitai* might pose such a serious threat to the vested interests of the Sadducee elite, who controlled both traditional society and the local economy in Jerusalem. Cohen (1997:42) asserts that "trapezitic businesses" in fourth-century Athens "were explicitly independent of parochial legal governance. Indeed, concerning contractual provisions, Athenian law seems to have mandated the primacy of whatever arrangements either party willingly agreed upon with the other". He also states that "In contractual contexts there is frequent reference to Athenian law mandating absolute governmental *non*-involvement in the conditions and terms of nongovernmental dealings" (emphasis added).⁸²

Consequently, the free-market operations of a *trapeza* within the primitive church in Jerusalem had the potential to divert significant funds and business activity away from the Temple-centric economy – just as the Essenes had done some 185 years earlier – and so further dilute the economic powerbase of those who controlled "traditional society" in that city. Also, if the sect's *trapeza* was organised along Greek-Hellenistic lines, it was not legally required and thus

81 According to Davies (2005), Pasiōn, the richest and most famous of all ancient Greek *trapezitai*, "started his banking career in 394 BC as a slave in the service of two leading Athenian bankers and rose to eclipse his masters, gaining in the process not only his freedom but also Athenian citizenship".

82 Cohen (1997:42, n. 3) cites Demosthenes 56.2; cf. Demosthenes 42.12 and 47.77; Hypereidēs, *Against Athēnogenēs* 13; and Deinarchos 3.4.

would have chosen not to place itself under the control of the local Jewish government authority. Therefore, from both a political and economic standpoint, the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* might easily have been considered a dangerous threat by the ruling oligarchy of Jerusalem, because they owed no specific loyalty or allegiance to the socio-political order of the city in which they were operating. Furthermore, since most of the functions performed by the *trapezitai* consisted of financial transactions generated by a supposedly impartial marketplace, which included, accepted and sometimes even promoted people who were *neither* members of the local socio-political order, *nor* endorsed by the ruling oligarchy, those functions and/or transactions could not therefore be controlled by that oligarchy.⁸³

3.7 The Blurred Line between Banking and Charity

In Acts 4:34–35, Luke writes that members of the primitive church community took funds raised from the sale of their goods and property and laid them down at the feet of the apostles,⁸⁴ which Barrett (1994:255) comments, “seems to be a Lucanism”. The Greek verb used in v. 35 (also v. 37 and 5:2) is τίθημι (*tithēmi*, ‘to set, put, place’); and, interestingly, Cohen (1997:111–112) writes that two Greek nouns for ‘placements’, *thema* and *parathema*, were also employed in the latter Hellenistic period as terms with the specialised meaning of ‘bank deposit’.

On that basis, the language in Luke’s reference to the ‘placing’ of funds at the feet of the apostles could be deemed to support an interpretation that depicts some sort of commercial or banking-related activity,⁸⁵ as opposed to the public donation scenario portrayed by traditional exegesis.⁸⁶ Besides that, in the matter of charitable giving, Jesus specifically condemned any kind of act conducted in public (see Matthew 6:3), and stipulated privacy, if not secrecy, to

83 Kautsky (1982:34) explains that, in an ancient “commercialized” economy (i.e. one that depends on wealthy merchants and bankers), aristocrats and/or oligarchs “are no longer free to govern wholly in accordance with traditional aristocratic standards and to control completely the sphere formerly reserved entirely to them”.

84 Likewise Acts 4:37 states that Joseph-Barnabas, “Sold a field which belonged to him and brought the sum of money and *laid it at the feet* of the apostles” (emphasis added).

85 Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:48–49) cite Preuschen, who thinks that Acts 4:35, 37 and 5:2 refers to an old legal custom by which, in a transfer of property, the giver places it at or under the feet of the receiver, which supports my argument that Acts 4:35 depicts a commercial transaction.

86 Johnson (1980:200) even suggests that, in Acts 4:34–35, Luke is using possessions as a symbol of the self: i.e. the members of the congregations are laying themselves at the feet of the apostles. Obviously, I disagree with this unfounded over-spiritualisation.

the point where our left hand should not know what our right hand was doing. Matthew 6:1–2 implies that Christ prescribed a secretive method of almsgiving in the hope of rescuing a pious act from the propensity for self-aggrandisement within Jewish ritual. We could even speculate that He also specified secrecy in order to differentiate this particular pious act from pagan votive offerings dating back to ancient Greek and Roman times that, according to Conzelmann (1987:36), were “laid at the feet” of the deity.⁸⁷

Therefore, the description of funds being laid or “placed” at the feet of the apostles in Acts 4:35, 37 & 5:2 presents us with something of an exegetical conundrum. If we are meant to interpret the language describing this particular activity as the depiction of a charitable event, then its public nature – and Christ’s specific instruction not to “publicise” charitable giving in any manner whatsoever – argues against a charitable context, and thus in favour of something more appropriate for enactment in public, or at least before third party witnesses: e.g. some activity of a commercial nature, which possibly includes banking.⁸⁸ However, I am not suggesting that this activity was entirely commercial in nature, as the amalgamation of banking and charitable activities within religious groups is attested as far back as the time of the ancient Mesopotamian temple estates.⁸⁹

Acts 6:2–3 offers a further example where Luke’s language would appear to blur the line between commerce and charity: when the apostles asked the multitude to put forward seven suitable candidates to “look after this business”. As discussed above, this activity, depicted by the Greek phrase *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, has been interpreted traditionally as some form of charitable work – that looked after the needs of the allegedly “poor” widows within the community. In Acts 6:3, the Greek word translated as ‘business’ is *χρεία* (*chreia*);⁹⁰ and, interestingly, the Zenon papyri contain the variant spelling of *χρεα* (*chrea*),⁹¹ which

87 See, for example, Lucian, *Philopseudes* 20.

88 We learn from Cohen (1997:113, 206) that, in fourth-century Athens, “Deposits placed with banks are even denominated as ‘loans’ to the *trapeza*”; and also that “lenders [and thus so-called depositors] needed witnesses who could confirm that the requisite monies had actually been advanced to the borrowers”; cf. Acts 5:6, which states that, after the death of Ananias, “the young men arose and wrapped up [the body] and carried it out and buried it”, thus implying the presence of others, apart from members of the Twelve, when Ananias “placed” his fraudulent, so-called “offering” at the feet of the apostles. If so, it reinforces the public nature of the event.

89 In accordance with the assertion by Sterba (1976:19); quoted in Chapter 4.3, *Mesopotamian-Babylonian temple-banking*.

90 According to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1922:65), and also Bruce (1970:152), in Hellenistic Greek, *chreia* generally means ‘office’.

91 See *Cairo Zenon Papyri* 25.2, 148 (3rd century BCE).

Cohen (1997:201) informs us is one of two words specifically used for ‘loans’; the other being δανεισματα (*daneismata*). Furthermore, Vine defines *chreia* in Acts 6:3 specifically as “the distribution of funds” (i.e. money),⁹² which does not tally with an exclusively charitable interpretation of this passage, given what we know about the non-financial content of the daily *tamhūy* and weekly *quppāh*.

I appreciate that Vine does not enjoy widespread acceptance amongst biblical scholars; however, his definition is supported in part by Strong’s Concordance, which states that *chreia* comes from the root χράομαι (*chrāo-mai*, whose various meanings include ‘to receive a loan’ and also ‘to borrow’). This too makes it reasonably clear that the activity under discussion is something other than the normal, food and/or clothing-related (i.e. non-financial) charitable practices of the time. Also, acceptance of “the distribution of funds” as an appropriate interpretation of *chreia* provides a better match for the description of the activity mentioned in Acts 2:45 when, according to Barrett (1994:169), money obtained from the sale of property and private possessions was “shared out to the needy as anyone from time to time had need”. This would seem to refer to some kind of ad hoc activity involving money – in contrast to the regular distribution of non-financial items, as in the *tamhūy* or *quppāh* – which again supports my argument that, initially, the apostles and, subsequently, the Hellenist *trapezitai* were involved in something akin to the kind of banking and other financial activity historically associated with temples and religious sects.

According to Bogaert (1966, in de Roover, 1967:252), the typical bank of the Greco-Roman era was “an institution which accepts demand deposits and re-lends part of these funds while keeping a sufficient cash reserve to meet withdrawals”. In other words, the depositors of a typical commercial bank usually lend their money to the bank for the purpose of onward lending to those in need of funds;⁹³ and, in practice, they expect their money returned – usually with interest – when they want it, or at least after an agreed period.⁹⁴ However,

92 See <http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/ved/search.cgi?w=Business>; accessed on December 30th 2014.

93 See Cohen (1997:113) who explains that “Linguistically, the Greeks defined ‘lending’ and ‘borrowing’ by the same term, *daniez* [...] Thus it was natural to describe the receipt of funds by a bank as a loan, and the disbursement of money to others also as a loan”. Hence, the NT uses δανείζω (*daneizō*) for both ‘to lend’ (Luke 6:34–35; 11:5) and ‘to borrow’ (Matthew 5:42); likewise, the Hebrew לָוָה (*lāvā*) is rendered as both ‘to lend’ (literally, ‘to cause to borrow’) and ‘to borrow’: e.g. Deuteronomy 28:12, “you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow”.

94 As in the case of modern term deposits, which offer higher than average interest rates to those prepared to leave their funds with the bank for a set period: e.g. 5 or 10 years.

Luke's description of the altruistic ethos of the primitive church implies that it is unlikely that any *trapeza* at the heart of the congregation operated with depositors' funds repayable on demand. Especially if we assume that, in the day-to-day operations of the *trapeza*, both Hebrew apostles and Hellenist *trapezitai* would have been guided by their memories of Christ's instructions concerning loans: e.g. "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you?" (Luke 6:34); also, "do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:42).⁹⁵

Consequently, if the depositors-cum-donors within the primitive church provided funds as loan stock for distribution via the congregation's *trapeza* – without expectation of repayment – we can understand why Luke's description of this activity in Acts 4:32 could be so easily misconstrued as being purely of a charitable nature. In such a context, we could speculate that any so-called depositors would *not* exhibit a legalistic, proprietary attitude to their funds, and thus *not* consider that "anything which he possessed was [exclusively] his own, but everything they had was [in practice] in common and for the use of all" (Acts 4:32). Furthermore, according to Andreau (1999:40), there were two distinct categories of bank deposits in the Roman Empire. So-called "sealed" deposits had to be returned to the owner-depositor in their original form: e.g. the same coins that were left on deposit. However, "non-sealed" deposits allowed the banker to reinvest or onward lend the funds, provided he subsequently restored an equivalent sum to the depositor. Thus, although the link may be considered tenuous, the lack of a proprietorial attitude towards possessions described in Acts 4:32 could be an allusion to the Roman banking practice known as "non-sealed" deposits.

The possible adherence to OT law and the edicts of Christ by the leadership and members of the nascent sect also raises an interesting question: what is the difference between donations (i.e. acts of charity) and loans that are not expected to be repaid? In practical economic terms, the answer is simple but profound. Donations are the financial equivalent of non-renewable resources which, sooner or later, will be fully expended; whereas, loans that are not expected to be repaid – *if repaid* – can be recycled almost indefinitely. An interesting example of this phenomenon can be found in the work of modern, faith-based microfinance groups that make microloans (i.e. "productive" loans

95 Jesus was no doubt alluding here to Deuteronomy 15:7–8: "If there is among you a poor man, one of the kinsmen in any of the towns of your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your [mind and] heart, or close your hand to your poor brother. But you shall open your hand wide to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his needs, which he lacks".

for business purposes) to needy clients in less developed countries such as Pakistan, Africa and The Philippines. Capital for these loans is raised primarily through donations collected in developed countries such as North America, Europe and Australia; and the only financial benefit available to the donors comes in the form of a tax deduction (but only in jurisdictions where charitable giving is deductible). Paradoxically, their capital raising methodology has forced these microfinance organisations to register as charities in their home countries, and not as banks;⁹⁶ thus providing contemporary evidence to suggest how the line between the two functions may also have been blurred in first-century Jerusalem.

Moreover, if the collective credit record of the "needy" amongst the primitive church in first-century Jerusalem was anything like that of their modern counterparts in less developed countries (i.e. a loan repayment rate just above 97 per cent),⁹⁷ then it is entirely plausible that almost all of the loans advanced by the apostles and Hellenist *trapezitai* would also have been repaid – especially if those "devout" first-century converts adhered to the edict concerning repayment of loans – and also perhaps within a reasonably short period of time, thus allowing the original funds to be recycled as new loans to other "needy" persons within the congregation.⁹⁸ Furthermore, if we take into account the large amount of foreign trade being conducted in Jerusalem at that time, and the significant number of Diaspora Jews within the nascent

96 In 2001, the microfinance group, Opportunity International, was granted a banking charter by the Filipino government and became that country's first "Thrift Bank to the Poor". This banking licence allows the Opportunity Microfinance Bank to accept deposits from local customers, and also raise loan capital in the international wholesale interbank market – in order to augment donations from western donors. The stated mission of the OMB is "to strive to make banking a means to help the poor develop their God-given capabilities, nurture their faith and lift themselves out of poverty". See <http://www.mixmarket.org/mfi/omb>; accessed on June 23rd 2010.

97 Based on a sample of 704 Micro-Finance Institutions, the median figure in 2006 for Portfolio at Risk was 2.8% [Source: Microfinance Information Exchange, Inc. report, available online at <http://www.themix.org/publications.aspx?level=001-IND>]; accessed on August 7th 2009.

98 It is highly likely that first-century loans extended to pious Jewish Jesus-Believers would have been repaid – even when there was no expectation on the part of the lender. As Mills (1989:2) explains, the OT teaching on lending and borrowing imposed "a strong obligation on the debtor to repay [...] Deliberate failure to repay a debt was tantamount to theft. David observes that 'the wicked borrow and do not repay'" (Psalm 37:21). Interestingly, many modern microfinance loans are repaid within a twelve or even six month period; and, if the primitive church *trapeza* experienced similarly short, lending-repayment cycles, this would theoretically allow for repeated and thus extensive recycling of the loan funds over the length of time the "bank" was in operation: i.e. three to three and a half years.

sect's membership, it is possible that some of this lending may also have taken the form of short-term trade finance. As I discuss in Chapter 10, this kind of financing activity was widely attested and also highly lucrative; and, at the time under review, had been conducted at a reasonable level of sophistication throughout the Greco-Roman world for something like four centuries.

Therefore, the useful life of funds raised from the sale of various pieces of property and valuable possessions, as described in Acts 4:34–35, could have been extended considerably – thus providing greater economic benefit to the community as a whole – if managed productively within the financing operations of a temple/sect banking facility, rather than if deployed exclusively as charitable donations. And if the funds were indeed recycled repeatedly – in the form of loans to different borrowers at different times – this would have added considerably to the workload pressure experienced by the Hebrew apostles, as highlighted in Acts 6:1.

Temple Banks and Priest-Bankers

4.1 A Blessing in Your Barns

And the Lord shall make you have a surplus of prosperity, through the fruit of your body, of your livestock, and of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you.

The Lord shall open to you His good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

Deuteronomy 28:11–12

According to the Mosaic-Sinai covenant, if the people of Yahweh would heed His commandments, He promised to “command” (Hebrew: צִוָּה, *šāvā*, ‘cause to exist’) a blessing in His people’s “storehouses” or “barns” (Deuteronomy 28:8) that would result in more than just prosperity, but in a *surplus* of prosperity (28:11).

The AMPC correctly uses the word “surplus” in verse 11 because the Hebrew יָתַר (*yāṭar*) means ‘have more than enough, have an excess’, which obviously describes a situation where people have far more than they require for their own needs. However, the issue we are concerned with here is what happens to that surplus. Once harvested, it needs to be stored, and Sterba (1976:18–19) asserts that, “in an [ancient] economy employing commodity money, stored goods represent both cash reserves and loanable funds”.¹ Thus, it would be something of a natural progression for the people of Yahweh to evolve from being successful grain producers to become grain traders – and eventually grain bankers. This is why, just one verse later, in Deuteronomy 28:12, we read that Yahweh’s abundant blessing would provide His people with the opportunity to lend to many nations (Hebrew: יָגַד, *gôy*, usually a reference to non-Hebrew people),² which would cause them to become powerful enough to achieve economic and perhaps even political hegemony over the surrounding nations; a

¹ In Deuteronomy 28:8, the DARBY translates מִנְעָמִים (*‘āsām*, barns’ or ‘storehouses’) as “granaries”.

² Interestingly, Deuteronomy 23:20 allows Jews to charge interest when they lend to “foreigners” (See Chapter 10.7, *The question of interest*); thus, in Deuteronomy 28:12–13 we have a promise/prophesy that the people of Yahweh would become a major regional force in commodity-based banking.

situation in which they would become “the head and not the tail [...] above and not beneath” (Deuteronomy 28:13).

Consequently, the link between banking activity and Yahweh’s promises of divine prosperity appears to be based on more than simply finding something profitable to do with surplus grain. For example, in different biblical episodes, when Yahweh desired to (a) protect His people from the devastation of famine, and/or (b) liberate them from the oppression of a corrupt oligarchy, His solution to the problem appears to have involved banking in some form. Firstly, in Genesis, we read that, to safeguard the extended family of Jacob-Israel from the effects of a severe famine that impacted the entire region, Yahweh inspired the patriarch Joseph to establish a royal grain bank in Egypt. Secondly, in the sixth century BCE, when Yahweh grew tired of the seemingly endless procession of corrupt, oppressive monarchs and elites in Israel and Judah, He orchestrated the start of a paradigm shift in traditional Jewish economic practices – from predominantly agrarian to extensively mercantile – by introducing His people to the economic benefits of exile in Babylon,³ where many of them acquired mercantile experience and skills that would have involved banking.

Finally, if we accept the banking-related rendering of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, in the first century CE, when Judea was again ruled by a corrupt oligarchy, consisting of the Herodians and aristocratic Sadducees, the benefits of the outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” (in tandem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) would have been leveraged and also increased significantly by the operation of a banking facility within the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers. These and other factors make it important to explore the connection between banking and ancient religions; with a particular focus on the people of Yahweh – from Egypt to Babylon and beyond.

4.2 The Temple-based Origins of Banking

The association of money and temples has its roots in both Greek and Roman mythology. For example, the Greek etymological origin of the English word “money” reputedly involves an argument between Zeus and Hera, as portrayed in Homer’s *Iliad* (15:15–25), in which Zeus punished his wife by chaining her in limbo between earth and sky.

In this predicament, the goddess was described as *Heras monetas*, ‘lonely Hera’, and the English word “money” apparently comes from *moneres* or *mone*,

3 According to Jeremiah 24:5, Yahweh sent the Jewish exiles “into the land of the Chaldeans for their good” (Hebrew: טוֹב, *tób*, ‘good, benefit, prosperity’).

because the lonely Hera was allegedly bound with a golden chain. However, with the help of her son, Hephaestus, Hera broke the chain and released herself; and the ancient Greeks believed that all gold found on earth originated from the fragments of this chain when it fell from the sky. This myth is supposedly the main reason why gold coins were not minted in Greece until 356 BCE. In a similar vein, we learn from Davies (2002:88) that the Latin origin of the word “money” is a Roman legend concerning the sack of Rome in 390 BCE, which maintains that, when the Gauls attempted to mount a surprise attack against defenders who had retreated to the Capitoline Hill, the besieged Romans were alerted by the cackling of sacred geese around the temple of Jupiter,⁴ where valuable assets were deposited for safekeeping. The warning allowed the defenders to rally in time to repel their attackers, which they managed to do successfully for some seven months. In thanks, according to Davies, “the Romans built a shrine to Moneta, the goddess of warning, or of advice. It is from [the name of] Moneta that we derive both ‘money’ and ‘mint’”.

Davies (2002:50) further explains that “banking operations of the temple and palace-based banks predate the use of coinage by a thousand years”;⁵ and the earliest records dealing with money and banking are associated with temples because “Security for deposits was more easily assured in the temples and royal palaces than in private houses”. Hamilton (1964:366) concurs, and asserts that “Temples quickly accumulated large amounts of coined money offered to the gods. Being the property of the gods, these temple funds enjoyed the unique security of divine protection, with the result that temples were considered the safest places for money in antiquity.”⁶ This security factor attracted the surplus funds of states, corporations, and private individuals until custody of deposits became a regular feature of temples. Temples became the first banks”. He goes on to state that “Ways were soon found of investing these funds to advantage through loans”. In agreement, Cohen (1997:42, n. 2) writes that “The financial operations of religious complexes utilised funds belonging to a particular deity and offered loans to finance cult expenses”. Likewise, Temin (2002:24) informs us that temple-banking operations continued in the Roman era and, in order

4 Some versions of this legend claim that it was the Temple of Juno.

5 The earliest banks were depositaries for surplus grain. See Chapter 4.3, *Mesopotamian-Babylonian temple banking*.

6 Interestingly, Steinsaltz (2006:217) writes that people who deposited their funds in the temple in Jerusalem sometimes marked their money-chests as “Temple property” in order to dissuade thieves.

to finance cult expenses, the temples had to adopt an aggressive lending programme that earned at least a 12 per cent annual return on their capital.⁷

However, caution is urged at this point, because any study of ancient banking encounters problems if we insist on applying an overly-strict definition of a bank to any ancient so-called banking operation. After all, according to de Roover (1967:252), if Bogaert's definition of a bank were applied to the operations of the Medici and Fuggers, they would fail to qualify as bankers because they did not operate in the main with deposit funds repayable at request by the depositor. Also, it can be counterproductive if we allow ourselves to get bogged down in any debate over these technicalities because, in doing so, we might miss a salient point: namely, that in order to survive, let alone thrive, temples of various religions needed to engage in outside commercial activities – some more aggressively than others. And some of that outside commercial activity involved the acceptance of deposits,⁸ and also lending money. Therefore, whether temple treasury operations were or were not banks in the strict sense is not the point for, as Chachi (2005:4, 21) states both succinctly and correctly, temples certainly *acted as banks*.

4.3 Mesopotamian-Babylonian Temple Banking

Sterba (1976:25–26) speculates that the origins of what he calls the Mesopotamian temple “corporation” (i.e. estate) “go back to the tribal customs of the unknown people who first erected temples at Eridu, Ubaid and Uruk in the fifth and fourth millennia BC”, and asserts that its success is demonstrated by its longevity. He explains (1976:19) that these temple estates “combined many functions of a modern day public treasury, commercial bank, accounting firm and welfare agency”, which meant that they “received revenues from various enterprises, collected taxes and rents, disbursed payrolls, redistributed income by means of grants to the needy, under-wrote foreign trade and sometimes made loans to private individuals”. Moreover, as part of the management of

7 Temin (2002:24, citing Sosin, 2001) writes that “endowment accounts often anticipated an expenditure at or near 12 per cent annually, implying that the funds had to earn at least 12 per cent to preserve the endowment. The temples holding the endowments had to have an aggressive loaning policy to earn this much”. We also know from Cohen (1997:52) and Bogaert (2000) that 12 per cent per annum (or 1 per cent per month) was the standard rate of interest in the Greco-Roman period.

8 Of particular interest, according to Stegemann (1998:72), the Temple in Jerusalem levied a tax on deposits left with their treasury.

local economic affairs, temple authorities also administered price controls and set interest rates.

From Orsingher (1967:1), we learn that “Historical excavations have uncovered the temple of Uruk and Chaldea, a relic of the Babylonian empire, and have shown that the foundation of the oldest banking building in the world took place more than 3,300 years before our era”. Since the medium of exchange at the time was predominantly barley, the evidence of extensive storage facilities associated with temples implies that the temple estates operated grain banks; because, as mentioned previously, according to Sterba (1976:18–19), “in an economy employing commodity money, stored goods represent both cash reserves and loanable funds”.⁹ Furthermore, Davies (2005) asserts that, even though they had to carry out various financial operations without the benefit and facility of coinage, which at that time had not been invented, the early Babylonians developed their banking activity to quite a sophisticated degree. And Chachi (2005:4, 21) agrees that the available historical evidence, dating from as early as 3400 BCE, “shows that a very advanced banking system was carried out by the religious temples which used to take care of the savings of their depositors and give loans to those who need finance, thus acting as banks”.

This is confirmed by Davies (2002:50), who also reports that, somewhere around 3400 BCE, the activities of Mesopotamian temple banks expanded from being merely a safe deposit for funds to include the provision of loans, when receipts for deposits came to be used for transfers not only to the original depositors but also to third parties. We have attestation for this development in a script excavated at the temple of Uruk, which, according to Homoud (1985:17–18), describes a reasonably sophisticated credit transaction: the loan of a quantity of silver, from the priestess of the temple to a farmer, in order to finance his purchase of sesame. From this document we are able to glean the following: since the borrower was a producer, this was a *productive* loan, not for personal consumption. Also, the farmer undertook to repay the loan of silver with an agreed value of sesame (at whatever price was current at harvest time) to the holder of this ancient form of a “promissory note”, which was made payable to the bearer; thus, the loan was transferable.¹⁰

9 He writes that “Pantries, granaries, bins and warehouses were built along the inner side of the wall surrounding the temple ground”.

10 Also, because the farmer agreed to repay the loan at some point in the future (i.e. at harvest time) with an amount of sesame at a pre-agreed value, this transaction also represents an ancient form of a commodity futures forward contract – a hedge/trading instrument used widely today by both commodity traders and corporations.

Finally, Orsingher (1964:viii) claims that the Code of Hammurabi, dated around 754 BCE, provides categorical evidence that, by this period, “Bank operations by temples and great landowners had become so numerous and so important” it became “necessary to lay down standard rules of procedure”. However, Sterba (1976:26) explains that temple estates began to decline during the Hammurabi dynasty, since “Hammurabi and his successors consciously pursued policies encouraging private ownership of land, thus chipping away at the economic base of the temple corporation”.

4.4 Greco-Roman Temple Banking

Bogaert (1968, in Macro, 1970:350) writes that, from early antiquity, Greek sanctuaries provided facilities for the safe-keeping of precious objects; and, with the introduction of money, they also accepted deposits of coin.

He also states that, of the twenty-five sanctuaries for which banking operations are attested, twenty extended loans. However, he argues that the capital for these loans came from the temple treasury or, to be more precise, its surplus funds – and not from outside client deposits.¹¹ From Hamilton (1964:366), we learn that, “due to the expansion of commerce and a money economy, the Hellenistic period saw a considerable increase in banking activity”. Interestingly, after the fourth century BCE, private banks tended to overshadow temple banks in large commercial centres; however, Rostovtzeff (1941:231ff., 425, 648–649, 673, 1290) claims that, during this period, there is evidence of the continued operation of Greek temple banks in Sardis, Claris, Pessinus, Mylasa, Aymus, and Caria – although, the most famous of these banks were apparently at Ephesus, Delos, Olympus and Delphi. In fact, Homer (1963:38) writes that the Shrine of Delphi has sometimes been described as “the great banker of the Greek world”; although Temin (2001:22) differs, claiming that “The most famous banks were on Delos, where there were both temple and private banks”.

11 Andreau (1999:120) agrees that certain Greek sanctuaries loaned money at interest; however, he contends that, since “such a sanctuary belonged to its city, it was in fact the city that was advancing the loans”, as confirmed by Cohen (1997:42, n. 2): “The public authorities who controlled the shrines were intimately involved with these operations. Indeed, the best attested of these banks, that at Delos, was controlled by Athens, both before 314 and after 166”.

According to Davies (2005), because Delos was a barren offshore island, the inhabitants had to live off their wits and make the most of their two great assets: the island's magnificent natural harbour and the famous temple of Apollo – both of which figured greatly in the development of trading and financial activities.¹² He also asserts that credit transfer was a characteristic feature of banking in Delos where cash transactions “were replaced by real credit receipts and payments made on simple instructions with accounts kept for each client”. From Temin (2002:22) we learn that “the Temple of Apollo appeared to give loans with houses as security, what we now would regard as a mortgage”,¹³ which is supported by Reger (1992:324) who states that, between 314 and 167 BCE, the temple lent money to private persons, using private land as security – out of general temple funds and/or any number of private foundations with which it was associated. Furthermore, Winkler (1933:22) points out that the temple bank on Delos has the dubious distinction of suffering the first recorded instance of a government loan default when, between 377–373 BCE, two Greek city-states defaulted totally on loans extended by the temple, and some others defaulted partially.

Finally, Temin (2001:22) informs us that “there were banks in Greece before Rome came that continued in operation after the Roman conquest”; and Davies (2005) confirms that, after the Romans destroyed Carthage and Corinth, the two main commercial rivals of Delos, “it was natural that the Bank of Delos should become the model most closely imitated by the banks of Rome”.¹⁴ Also, Temin (2002:25) writes that “temples were an important means of ‘pooling’ investment funds in the early Roman Empire”; and that, as part of this lending activity, they extended credit to Roman businessmen looking for funding for their enterprises.

12 According to Finley (1973:174), in the second century BCE, “the affluent temple of Apollo at Delos stored both its own savings and those of the city-state of Delos in its divinely protected strong-room [...] The two treasuries were called the ‘sacred chest’ and the ‘public chest’”. He states that the treasury held substantial savings: e.g. one group of excavated jars contained 48,000 drachmas (or 8 talents).

13 He cites Durrbach (1926), plus Frank (1933:357); and further asserts that “There can be no doubt that these institutions were what we call commercial banks”.

14 Rostovtzeff (1936:248) informs us that, after 168 BCE, Delos became, by Roman grant, *porto-franco*. “It was a clearing house for Aegean commerce, especially for the commerce of foodstuffs, chiefly grain” as well as a “connecting link between Italy and the eastern Hellenistic world”. However, eventually, “Rome discarded Delos like an old rag, taking away her protection and leaving it to its own destiny. Its place in Italy was taken by Puteoli in Campania and later by Ostia, its place in the Aegean by Rhodes”.

4.5 The Ancient Jewish Connection with Banking

The earliest, albeit implicit reference to a banking facility in the Hebrew Bible can be found in Genesis 41:33–37, when Joseph advised Pharaoh on the establishment of what would be categorised as a royal grain bank.¹⁵

In Genesis 42:6 and 45:26, in various bibles (e.g. AMPC, KJV and NIV), we are told that Joseph was “governor over the land” of Egypt; however, I would argue that this title is not precise enough to describe a person who is portrayed in explicit terms as being in control of the national economy.¹⁶ The Hebrew words שָׁלִיט (*šallîṭ*, Genesis 42:6) and מַשָּׁל (*māšāl*, 45:26) both carry the general-purpose meaning of ‘ruler’¹⁷ or ‘one who has dominion’; but, more specifically, in Genesis 41:40 & 43, we are told that Joseph ruled as second-in-command to Pharaoh. In the United Kingdom, the second most important politician after the Prime Minister is the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the most powerful financial position in the country. Accordingly, I would suggest that “Chancellor of the Exchequer” is a more accurate title to describe Joseph’s position. I also find it no coincidence that, in Hebrew, the name given to Joseph by Pharaoh is זָפְנַת פָּנֵהָ (Zaphenath-paneah, Genesis 41:45), which means ‘treasury of the glorious rest’.

At Pharaoh’s decree, Joseph was given “Asenath daughter of Potiphra, priest of On,¹⁸ to be his wife” (Genesis 41:45), which may have been done in recognition of his evident priest-like qualities:¹⁹ e.g. “a man in whom is the Spirit of God” (Genesis 41:38). However, implicit in this gesture are two possibilities: firstly, since temple banks already existed in Egypt, it is possible that Joseph needed be accorded some sort of high priestly status in order to control them. Or, secondly, that this new, royal grain bank was to be granted the

15 Chachi (2005:7) and Davies (2005) both confirm that banking operations commenced in Egypt even before the introduction of coinage, with harvests being stored centrally in state warehouses.

16 Interestingly, since Joseph’s 70-member family settled as shepherd-pastoralists in Goshen (Genesis 46–47), this means that they did not play an integral part in Egypt’s all-important grain economy; and the lack of participation in this central economic powerbase may help explain why the Children of Israel became vulnerable to persecution under a later Pharaoh.

17 LXX Genesis 42:6 and 45:26 use ἄρχων (*archōn*, ‘ruler’), which is how the NASB describes Joseph’s position.

18 On’ is Hebrew for the name of the city later known in Greek as Ἡλιούπολις (*Heliopolis*, ‘city of the sun’). It was the principal seat of sun worship to *Atum-Re*, ‘the evening sun’.

19 Other historical examples of extremely powerful priest-statesmen include the cardinals Wolsey (Lord Chancellor of England, 1515–1519) and Richelieu (Prime Minister of France, 1624–1643).

secondary status of a temple bank, to demonstrate to the people of Egypt and surrounding nations that it would enjoy protection and patronage at the highest possible levels of authority – both secular and sacred. Furthermore, if we take into consideration Sterba's comment concerning stored goods representing both cash and loanable funds, the Mosaic-Sinai covenant promise whereby Yahweh will "command" a blessing in the people's barns and storehouses (Deuteronomy 28:8) implies that the Children of Israel may have operated some form of grain-banking in Canaan. Especially since this passage contains the aforementioned promise that they will "lend to many nations" (28:12) out of a "surplus of prosperity" (28:11); i.e. from grain harvests that were extraordinarily abundant. Finally, we are informed in 1 Chronicles 9:26 and 26:20 that, during the reign of David, various Levites were in charge of the "treasuries of the house of God", and thus performed the role of priest-bankers.

After the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE, Mesopotamian temple estates (and their attendant banking operations) ceased to be any kind of economic force. Chachi (2005:8) explains that, as a result of the conquest, "Persian traders managed to learn the Babylonian banking methods". In fact, the Persians improved the existing Babylonian banking practices by exploiting the use of coinage, an innovation introduced into Persia through Cyrus' conquest of the Lydian empire in 546 BCE; and this combination, when added to the Persians' long-established usage of weights and measures (introduced under the Achaemenid dynasty sometime after 700 BCE) stimulated foreign commerce and facilitated an expansion in banking activities. Of particular significance is evidence that dates back to pre-exilic times of possible links between Jewish people and prominent Babylonian banking firms: e.g. the House of Egibi, which (in the seventh century BCE) was perhaps the most prominent banking group in Babylon. Davies (2002:51) informs us that this firm carried out a "very wide variety of business activities combined with their banking". They also accepted a wide range of deposits and gave loans against security;²⁰ and Gross (1975:10) speculates that the founder of this banking firm may have been Jewish, citing support not only from the man's name, Jacob, but also from the fact that loans were formally extended without interest.

A later prominent Babylonian mercantile-banking group with attested links to the Jewish people is the Sons of Murashu. This firm operated during the fifth

20 Davies cites Heichelheim (1958:72), who writes that "Customers could have current accounts with them and withdraw the whole or parts of certain deposits with cheques [...] Speculation and investment for secure income were combined in the business pattern of this bank". Chachi (2005:8) confirms that, amongst other things, the "Grandsons of Igibi" (sic) floated loans.

century BCE and was based in Nippur, which Tadmor (1976:162) reminds us is near the River Chebar; the area where, perhaps not coincidentally, the Jewish exiles originally settled.²¹ According to Davies (2002:51), the Sons of Murashu not only carried on the same kind of banking functions as the Grandsons of Egibi, they also administered the royal and larger private estates, as agents or tax-farmers, a role that invariably included the provision of loans to those who could not afford to pay the amount of tax assessed. Archives belonging to this firm were excavated in 1893 and consist of a corpus of some seven hundred and thirty tablets, dating from the reigns of Artaxerxes I (464 to 424 BCE) and Darius II (424 to 404 BCE). The tablets contain seventy names identified as Jewish, along with proof, according to Gross (1975:10), of “major contracts signed by wealthy Jewish landowners in their own right who traded with the Murashu sons on a basis of equality”.²² Coogan (1974:7) writes that:

The names of the principals and witnesses in the various contracts show that Nippur was a cosmopolitan city under Persian rule. Apart from the large number of individuals with Babylonian names there were also many Persians, Medes, Egyptians and West Semites; the last group included Jews with biblical names such as Hanani, Shabbatai and Jonathan.²³

Coogan (1974:10) also states that, in the tablet known as UM 121, we find evidence of a Jew called El-yadin, the son of Yadi'-yaw, acting as co-creditor in a loan transaction with Rimit-ninurta, a member of the Murashu firm. So here, from the fifth century BCE, we have proof of a Jew directly involved in an ancient example of a merchant-banking syndicate.

In addition, we also have evidence from the post-exilic period to show that the temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem was used for secular as well as religious purposes. However, I feel it necessary here to draw attention to the possible confusion arising from an overly-narrow view of the temple treasury in Jerusalem. The use of אֹצָר (*’ōṣār*, meaning ‘storehouse’ as well as ‘treasury’)

21 As mentioned in Ezekiel 1:1. Gross (1975:9) confirms that the exiles “developed a new center in and around Nippur, the second largest city in Babylonia, which was located on the ‘river’ Chebar or, rather, the canal connecting the Euphrates and Tigris”.

22 For a detailed discussion of the Jewish names recorded in the Murashu documents, see Coogan (1974:6–12). He states that, even though at times it is difficult to separate names that are Jewish from those of other Western Semitic nations, many of the names are Yahwistic and therefore can be determined as Jewish. Also, many names are attested in the biblical record of returning exiles.

23 One tablet, IX.45, dated the 36th year of Artaxerxes (428 BCE), depicts a contract between the Sons of Murashu and various Jewish principals acting jointly with members of a family under the headship of the family patriarch, Yadi'-yaw.

has helped to create the erroneous impression that the temple treasury was merely some kind of storage facility where the gold and silver ceremonial (i.e. sacred) vessels, as well as the robes and other cultic artefacts, were kept for safekeeping. However, Schaper (1997:204) argues that 'ôṣār is interchangeable with *lēšākôt*, which depicts a more sophisticated treasury operation that Tcherikover (1959:155) asserts "played the part of a state exchequer"²⁴ and which, over time, developed into a full-scale banking function. Also, using the LXX, Feldman et al (2000:25) explain that, "The sacred treasures of the temple (κεῖμηλία) are not to be confused with the treasury (θησαυρός), with its largely cash holdings". Hence, we find that Josephus uses different terms to differentiate between the sacred and secular workings of the temple treasury: e.g. 'the treasury of God' (*War* 2.50, 2.331; *Antiquities* 7.367, 69; 8.95, 258; 9.170, 202); 'the sacred treasury' (*War* 2.175, 293; 5.187); 'the treasury-chamber' (*War* 5.200; 6.282; *Antiquities* 9.164; 11.119, 126; 13.429; 19.294); and, finally, 'the public treasury' (*War* 2.564; 4.140; 5.518).

Furthermore, in Nehemiah 13:13, Shelemiah, a priest, Zadok, a scribe, and Pedaiah, a Levite, are listed as members of what Schaper (1997:202) calls "the Temple Treasury Committee" (in the KJV they are called "treasurers over the treasuries"). He goes on to explain (1997:204) that "the committee members oversaw not just the collection of tithes but also that of Persian imperial taxes" – which implies that they may also have performed the role of tax-farmers, and thus money-lenders. In fact, an early link between tax-farming and banking in Jerusalem is mentioned by Armstrong (1997:106), who writes that, during the reign of Ptolemy II (282–246 BCE), a member of the Tobiad clan, called Joseph, was appointed as tax-farmer for the province of Syria (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.6.2–4); and, during the 22 years he held this position, he "was able to introduce the high finance of the Hellenes into Jerusalem", thus establishing himself as a banker.²⁵

Finally, Hamilton (1964:366, n. 5) confirms that "There are clues in the (e.g. 1 Kings 7:51; 11 Kings 18:15; 1 Chronicles 9:26, 28:11–12; 11 Chronicles 36:18; Nehemiah 13:12, 13) as well as in Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 42:7) and Tobit (1:14, 9:5) to [the existence of] a bank in the temple at Jerusalem and to the attendant practices of private deposit and bookkeeping". Also, according to Feldman et al (2000:34), "Like other temples, the one in Jerusalem served also as a bank and

24 Tcherikover (1959:155) explains that "this was the direct outcome of the fact that the government of Judea was 'theocratic' or 'hierocratic', that is, that the priests who stood at the head of the cult also held the secular power".

25 Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.6.10) writes that "He was a good man, and of great magnanimity; and brought the Jews out of a state of poverty and meanness, to one that was more splendid".

a place of safe deposit. It was relatively secure because of its divinely protected status (*asylum*) and, practically, because of its thick walls and fortress-like position". In addition, Hamilton (1964:368–369) reminds us that the Temple treasury-bank extended loans and was used to finance public works (e.g. an aqueduct to bring water to the city);²⁶ and also that it was "in the control of the high-priestly well-to-do aristocracy".

26 Josephus (*War* 2.9.4 cf. *Antiquities* 18.3.2) reports that Pilate caused a "disturbance" by "exhausting the sacred treasury – it is called the *corbanas* – on a water conduit". Also, Stegemann and Stegemann (1999:106) mention Josephus' account (*Antiquities* 20.209–221) that "Agrippa II, after the completion of the temple construction, intentionally created work for the newly-unemployed by having them pave Jerusalem streets with the help of capital from the temple treasury".

The Shift in Jewish Economic Practices

5.1 Factors behind the Shift

We learn from Gross (1975:21) that, “It is a well-known sociological phenomenon that alien immigrants often turn to mercantile endeavours because they have no attachment to the foreign soil, shun isolated living among native majorities, are familiar with two or more languages and cultures, and hence are able to mediate between distant localities”.

For that reason, the Jewish exiles in Babylon experienced a critical shift in their economic activities when “The people who at home had devoted itself largely to agriculture and small crafts now assumed an important role in banking and far-flung commerce” (Gross, 1975:10).¹ Gross also claims that, “In Babylonia, particularly, which at that time marched in the vanguard of a semicapitalistic civilization, Jews entered the stream of advanced mercantile exchanges”, which is corroborated by Erlich (2009:760) with evidence from the royal Babylonian archives that several Jews acted as royal merchants or commercial agents. And Gross (1975:11) further adds that, “by acclimatizing themselves to their surroundings, many Jews, especially those living in Babylonia, acquired considerable wealth and extensive political as well as business contacts with the ruling classes of the empire”. For support, he cites the edict from Cyrus (Ezra 1:4) commanding the Jews who remained in Babylon to equip the returning exiles “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill-offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem”.

Although their research focuses predominantly on a later period (i.e. post-70 CE), Botticini and Eckstein (2003) offer some interesting insight into possible “human capital” reasons behind the progressive shift by Jews towards mercantile occupations, which they argue was caused primarily by the growth in

1 The pace and extent of this change is open to debate: e.g. Botticini and Eckstein (2003:3) maintain that the transition by Jews from agriculture to crafts, trade, and money-lending did not commence to any significant degree until the Talmudic period. Their argument is based on the view that, in Babylon, the majority of Jewish exiles were involved in agriculture, as holders of small plots (“bow-lands”), lessees of fields (along canals), tenants, gardeners and shepherds. However, Erlich (2009:760) challenges this view, which he argues “is dictated by the [available] documentation, which is mostly about grain fields and palm groves”; and further contends that “The almost total lack of information about Judean artisans [i.e. non-agrarian occupations] can be ascribed to the nature of the documentation”.

literacy amongst the Jewish people. Erlich (2009:760) notes that, in relative terms, “many Judeans were employed [in Babylon] as alphabet scribes, who wrote in Aramaic script, in contradistinction to the exclusively Babylonian scribes writing on clay”; and, interestingly, he suggests that the reason why Jews were overrepresented in this profession – and not Aramaeans or other West Semites – is because literacy became widespread in Judah in the late pre-exilic period, as attested in the rich epigraphic finds; in particular, the ostraca and bullae.

The ancient link between literacy and commerce is confirmed by Oates (1979:15, 25) who writes that “the invention of writing represented at first merely a technical advance in economic administration”.² From Aberbach (1982:19), we learn that exceptional economic conditions during the third century BCE made it possible to expand the learning of the Torah and also the educational system; and later, in about the first century BCE, Simeon ben Shetah made secondary schools compulsory.³ However, of particular interest is the comment by Botticini and Eckstein (2003:15) that “The ability to read and write religious texts also enabled the Jews to read and write any other documents written in Hebrew, such as business letters, contracts, loans and sales. Therefore, the religious requirement to learn the Torah in Hebrew turned out to be profitable in the economic sphere as well”. As mentioned previously, they also state (2003:12) that, during the first century BCE, “many pagans converted to Judaism at that time, as they saw that the Jews were doing well from an economic point of view”.

Elazar (1986) informs us that, during both the Greek and Roman epochs, the Jews of the Diaspora were concentrated in cities (except in Egypt); thus, it would be logical to find urbanised Jews adopting non-agrarian trades and occupations. However, Botticini and Eckstein’s model suggests that the potential for greater earnings was also an influencing factor. They contend (2003:3) that “Jewish education has a positive effect on a merchant’s income but not on a farmer’s income”; and their model shows that the propensity for Jews to invest in their children’s education leads to a preference for those children to become merchants. Kuznets (1960:1621) also hints at the attraction of economic advancement in his claim that, throughout history, “people engaged in handicrafts, trade and finance earned, on average, more than farmers”. This is

2 Davies (2002:50) suggests a more direct link with banking with his claim that “writing first appeared because of the prosaic need to record debts and credits. Handwriting from its very beginnings was closely associated and improved in parallel with the keeping of accounts”.

3 Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.12) writes that, “Our principal care of all is this, to educate our children well”.

confirmed by evidence from Sperber (1966:250–251) that, in Roman Palestine in the first century CE, an educated non-agrarian worker could earn on average twice as much as an agrarian worker: e.g. the daily wage of a vineyard worker was one *denarius*; whereas, the fee for a doctor and the daily wage of a scribe was two *denarii*.⁴ Finally, a comment by Edersheim (1904:96) suggests that the shift by Jews towards mercantile occupations may also have been a response to the oppression they experienced.

When Israel was scattered by units, hundreds, or even thousands, but still a miserable, vanquished, homeless, weak minority among the nations of the earth – avoided, down-trodden, and at the mercy of popular passion – no other course was open to them than to follow commerce [...] Moreover, it was necessary for their self-defence – almost for their existence – that they should gain influence. And in their circumstances this could only be obtained by the possession of wealth, and the sole road to this was commerce.⁵

5.2 An Economic Paradigm Shift with Social Consequences

It is perhaps no coincidence that the earlier stages of this Jewish occupational shift were played out against the backdrop of major economic changes in the Greek world: namely, the genesis of the so-called market economy. According to Cohen (1997:5), in the fifth century BCE, Aristotle complained about the “relatively recent development of a new type of economic activity that has adversely affected traditional values and methods”. This “monied mode of acquisition” (*chrēmatiskē ktētikē*) has arisen, he contends, from “the new dominance of distribution by experienced businessmen motivated by profit considerations (‘making money from one another’). The individual pursuit of profit reflects society’s new functioning through the exchange of goods and services for money, not bound by societal relations, replacing the prior system of household production/consumption, which had been augmented sporadically, where necessary, by barter within defined social relationships”.⁶

4 According to Sperber (1966:187), there is evidence from the same period for a similar earnings differential in Egypt, where the daily wage of a farm worker varied from $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{6}$ *denarius*, compared to a teacher who earned $\frac{1}{4}$ *denarius*.

5 In support of Edersheim’s argument, Easterly (2006:109) explains that poor peasants are much easier to repress with force than the richer, middle classes.

6 *Politics* 1256a-1257b and 1258b 1–4; cited in Cohen (1997:5). Moxnes (2004:29) explains that, in antiquity the economy was “embedded” in society and in its power structures, and “This

Cohen (1997:6) argues that this move from what is described as an “embedded” to a “market” economy was a fundamental paradigm shift in economic practice. Before the fourth century, the Athenian economy was organised in such a way as to enable the *oikos* or ‘household’ (i.e. an estate of significant size and worth, owned by a wealthy elite) to be self-sufficient, since the vast majority of economic activity was designed to produce goods for either consumption by the *oikos* or to secure/expand its assets and wealth. However, Cohen also writes that, by the fourth century, “agricultural products were increasingly being produced for cash sale; consumer items were now often produced by commercial workshops⁷ [...] Financial stability had become dependent on the credibility (*pistis*) in the marketplace of former slaves who were able to marshal unprecedentedly large monetary resources”. Rostovtzeff (1936:250) describes this new market economy as “a form of economic life which was based on economic freedom and individual economic activity and which was directed towards the free accumulation of capital in the hands of individuals and groups of individuals. It was founded on rationally organized agriculture and industry, functioning not to satisfy the needs of the producers and of a local restricted market, but for an indefinite market, and tending towards mass production of specialized goods”.

Furthermore, Davies (2002:71) adds that “the Greek prejudice against manual labour and against the everyday boredom of business life left the field wide open to enterprising ‘metics’ or foreign residents, many of who were to become prominent in banking”. As a result, this economic paradigm shift had a far-reaching social impact as well.

structure of power ruled production and exchange systems, which therefore did not operate according to a ‘free market’ economy”.

- 7 This paradigm shift can also be seen in the different works of Xenophon: e.g. *Oikonomikos*, written around 362 BCE, praises the Athenian *oikos* (‘household’ or estate) as the primary economic unit; however, in 354 BCE he published *Porio* (“Ways and Means”) in which he proposed economic measures that resemble certain aspects of rational capitalism and were designed to create a market economy by turning Athens into a centre of manufacture and free commercial exchange.

The Tension between Temple and Sect

Luke's description of the Christian communities in their confrontation with the Judaic world is, from the sociological point of view and in the terminology of Ernst Troeltsch, a testimony of a sectarian identity.

BOVON, 1992:189

The clash between the old faith and the new was to a large degree a struggle for power, although this is not to deny that strong feelings over doctrinal matters also played a part.

ESLER, 1987:21

6.1 Making Money and Making Enemies

As we have seen, banking grew out of an opportunity to do something profitable with the surplus grain from abundant harvests. From this, we may infer that it would have been perceived by the people of Yahweh as a key component of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant, and also an important dynamic within the fulfilment of the salvation-restoration oracles – as proclaimed by Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel et al; and subsequently alluded to by the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

The connection between banking and ancient religions is attested by evidence of temple banks that dates back far into antiquity; and it was still important throughout the Greek and Roman period. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to discover an important and enduring connection between the people of Yahweh and banking, which the Deuteronomist editors imply was orchestrated by Yahweh Himself. However, even though this connection appears to have been birthed out of the extreme circumstances of famine and exile, over time it became a critical factor in that people's shift from an economic model that was predominantly agrarian in nature to one that was extensively mercantile, and therefore offered greater prosperity. Consequently, we find it both plausible and also likely that there were a substantial number of merchants and merchant-financiers amongst the crowd of Diaspora Jews listening to Peter on the Day of Pentecost – who, as residents in Jerusalem,

would have been notably affluent, if not wealthy;¹ especially since the price of land and the cost of living in the capital was expensive, as discussed previously.

Furthermore, if a significant number of these merchants and financiers joined the primitive church congregation, we would then expect them to break off most if not all business connections with the Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem, which was controlled by the Sadducee elite who, in the words of Peter, were part of the “crooked (or corrupt) generation” (Acts 2:40) and also “crucified and put away [Jesus] by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). In that scenario, taking into account the combination of commercial necessity and historical precedent, it would be safe to assume that this group would choose to establish their own, separate banking facility. And if that kind of economic defection took place alongside the widely-recognised religious/secularian defection, it then becomes clear why leading members of the Sanhedrin may have seen the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers as a serious threat to their economic as well as their religious powerbase.

6.2 Key Elements Behind the Tension

The historic and long-standing power and privileges of the ruling Sadducees were established on the three pillars of religion, politics and economics.

However, according to Jeremias (1969:232), at the time of the events described by Luke, the Sadducee elite had been experiencing a steady and seemingly irreversible erosion of their religious authority and power for almost a century, commencing sometime during the reign of Queen Alexandra (c.76 BCE). Furthermore, under the Romans and Herodians, they experienced a similar erosion of their political autonomy and power, when the office of high priest ceased to be life-long and hereditary. As Schürer et al (1979:228) write, “Both Herod and the Romans deposed and appointed High Priests at will”; and, in this way, Jeremias (1969:159) argues, “Herod achieved his aim, in part at least, to make the high priest wholly dependent on [secular] political authority”. Nevertheless, through their continued control of the Temple cult and Temple treasury-bank, the Sadducee elite managed to maintain their economic powerbase. But now, if we accept a banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, it is possible that this too was under threat – from a new sect, whose Hebrew leaders had established a form of temple-banking

¹ Kollmann (2004:6) refers to the fact that “many Diaspora Jews, who on account of prosperity gained far from the motherland, had the means to move to Jerusalem”.

operation that appears to have experienced an even greater level of success when placed under the control of seven Hellenist *trapezitai*.

Against this background, the various details recorded in Acts 2 to 8, even some incidental and seemingly minor ones, provide the basis of a plot in both the literary and political sense; and one, I submit, that is cohesive as well as believable.

6.3 The Temple-centric Economy of Jerusalem

Just as the Temple dominated the skyline of Jerusalem, so it also dominated the city's economy. According to Jeremias, the Temple drew the largest share of the city's all important foreign trade (1969:38) and was also the most important factor in the city's internal commerce (1969:57), since "both by its rebuilding and by the daily cult, [the Temple] provided a focal point for various industries" (1969:4). In agreement, Sanders (1992:124) asserts that the needs of the Temple "directly or indirectly generated most of the city's business".

We learn from Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.380; 20.129) that work on the reconstruction of the Temple and surrounding buildings was started under Herod the Great in 19–20 BCE and was not finished until the governorship of Albinus in 62–64 CE. Jeremias (1969:56) comments on the enormous volume and quality of material that was consumed in those eighty-two or so years; and also explains (1969:138) that "The cultus provided the main source of income for the city.² It maintained the priestly aristocracy, the priesthood and the Temple employees. The vast expenditure from the Temple treasury [...] to say nothing of the many ceremonial activities of the devout, such as sacrifices and vows, provided numerous opportunities of money-making for the trade and commerce of the city". He also asserts that what he calls the middle classes – e.g. the retail traders (*kapēloi*) who had shops in one of the bazaars, and the small industrialists or craftsmen – benefited greatly from their connection with the Temple and its pilgrims; likewise, the tavern owners, who depended almost entirely on what Sanders (1992:121) refers to as "the tourist trade".

During the Roman era, temples still "acted as banks"; and, as Rostovtzeff asserts (1926:541, n. 45), "the temple of Jerusalem continued to be the place

2 He also confirms (1969:25) the importance with which the cultus was treated: "During the eighty-two to eighty-four years that the Temple was being built, the ceremonial was not interrupted for even an hour".

where Jews, both rich and poor, kept their money on deposit”.³ Jeremias (1969:55–56) writes that “From ancient times, the political centre had also been the centre of attraction for the national wealth. [...] The money was deposited in the Temple where, according to IV Maccabees 4:3,⁴ myriads of private fortunes were kept”. Moreover, this “national wealth” would not have been restricted to funds or assets belonging to the Sadducee elite, since Garnsey (1970:256) asserts that there are indications, in the Eastern cities in particular, that wealth was to be found beyond the elite circle consisting of the local Decuriate. Also, according to Edersheim (1997:55), “the case of people leaving the whole of their fortune to the Temple is so often discussed that it must have been a by no means uncommon occurrence”.⁵ And to suggest the extent of private funds on deposit in the temple, Hamilton (1964:367) cites a report in II Macabees 3:16,⁶ from Simon, the captain of the temple, that “the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the amount of the funds could not be reckoned, and that they did not belong to the account of the sacrifices”.⁷ Finally, Stegemann (1998:72) compares the temple treasury in first-century Jerusalem with banks in modern Switzerland:

Manifold privileges had by then made the Jerusalem Temple the safest bank in the Middle East. In the investment area, it enjoyed a respect like that of Switzerland today. Many foreigners, merchants and politicians

3 Rostovtzeff cites Josephus (*War* 6.5.2), who states that, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, in the temple treasury they found “immense amounts of money” because it was the place where “the entire riches of the Jews were heaped up together”. Likewise, Feldman et al (2000:34) cite the remark from Josephus that, at the time of the final conquest, “the treasury-chambers contained vast sums of money deposited by Jerusalem’s wealthiest citizens for safekeeping”, which is also mentioned by Stegemann and Stegemann (1999:125).

4 According to *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, IV Maccabees was written “probably at the close of the last century BCE or during the first century CE, and before the time of Caligula, for the Jews seem to have been at peace at the time”.

5 Tacitus (*History* 5.7) writes that Jerusalem had a temple “of enormous wealth”.

6 Harris (1985) contends that II Maccabees was written about 142 BCE. However, *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* states that “There is a reference in ch. xv. 37 to the Book of Esther, which would preclude any earlier date of authorship than about 130 BC (see Cornill, ‘Einleitung,’ p. 252). On the other hand, II Maccabees was known to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (see Peak, in *The Century Bible*, p. 223) and to Philo (see Schürer, *l.c.* p. 214). The work, therefore, must have been composed about the beginning of the common era”.

7 Feldman et al (2000:34) explain that “It remains unclear as to what extent the temple’s funds were maintained in separate accounts for temple use, civic projects (e.g. Josephus *War* 2.175, 564; 4.141; 5.518), and private savings”.

held accounts there – a lucrative business for the Temple bank, due to the deposit taxes it levied.

From Puech (2004:80), we learn that, in 54 BCE, “Crassus plundered the treasury of the Temple, carrying off 8,000 talents of gold and 2,000 talents of silver that Pompey had left in the treasury”.⁸ In addition, Josephus (*War* 7.148–150) records that Vespasian and his son Titus removed some 50 tons of gold and silver from the Temple, and that this wealth was paraded in triumph in the streets of Rome in 71 CE prior to being used to help finance the building of the Coliseum. In fact, Stegemann (1998:73) writes that, “As the Romans took Jerusalem in the summer of AD 70, they plundered – according to the report of Flavius Josephus (*Jewish War* 6.317) – such rich hoards of treasure that the price of gold in Syria plummeted by half”.

Now, phrases like “myriads of private fortunes” and “untold sums of money” may sound impressive, but they are not explicit enough to help us truly understand the significant level of wealth on deposit with the temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem in the first century CE. At the end of the nineteenth century, Edersheim (1898:369) estimated that the total value of temple treasury funds was “£2,500,000 Sterling”; however, he did not provide any information as to how he arrived at this figure. Nevertheless, if we can calculate a modern value for one or more specific amounts of money mentioned in the historical accounts, it will at least help us to gain a better insight into the level of wealth that the ancient historians were attempting to describe. And since the Attic-Ptolemaic standard talent was worth 6,000 *denarii* – and a *denarius* was the daily wage for a manual/agricultural labourer in first-century Palestine – we can use this ancient wage-rate to calculate a plausible modern value of those 10,000 talents plundered by Crassus,⁹ and also the 50 tons of gold and silver removed by Vespasian and his son Titus. This will then help to provide us with a better sense of the magnitude of the wealth on deposit in the Jerusalem temple-bank at the time under review.

This approach of using the cost of a unit of human labour as the numéraire to calculate different values in different historical periods and/or locations has a long and distinguished pedigree in economics, reaching back to Adam Smith (1776), who argued that differences in the standard of living should be

8 Puech is paraphrasing Josephus (*Antiquities* 14.78, 105–110) and also reports that “Antiochus IV Epiphanes carried off 1,800 talents from the temple” (11 Maccabees 5.21). Apparently, Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 BCE but had a hard time taking the Temple.

9 A talent (Greek: *τάλαντον*, *talanton*, ‘scale, balance’) was originally an ancient unit of mass, which corresponded to the volume/mass of water in an amphora, i.e. one cubic foot.

expressed precisely in such a unit; and was also cited by Ricardo (1816) and John Maynard Keynes, who used wage-rate rather than price level as a numéraire. Consequently, since Matthew 20:1–16 explains that an ancient agricultural worker worked a 12-hour day, we can use the minimum hourly wage for a UK farm labourer (i.e. Grade 6, as set by the UK government in 2021) to calculate a credible modern value for a first-century ‘talent’ – based on 8 hours of normal working time (at £9.40 per hour) plus 4 hours of overtime (at £14.10 per hour).¹⁰ That works out to be GBP £789,756 (i.e. $£9.40 \times 8 \times 6,000 + £14.10 \times 4 \times 6,000$) which, on May 10th 2022, was worth USD \$972,628.¹¹ On the other hand, if we use the US Bureau of Labor’s (May 2020) mean hourly wage estimate for US agricultural workers, which is \$16.51 per hour, then the modern American value of a talent works out to be well over one million US dollars ($\$16.51 \times 12 \times 6,000 = \$1,188,720$).¹² Then again, if we use the Bureau of Labor’s (May 2020) mean hourly wage estimate for construction workers (an equally acceptable modern counterpart for ancient manual labourers), which is \$20.67 per hour,¹³ the modern value of a talent could be deemed to be worth even more: slightly under one and a half million US dollars (i.e. $\$20.67 \times 12 \times 6,000 = \$1,488,240$).¹⁴

On that basis, we can state with some confidence that the 10,000 talents plundered by Crassus in 54 BCE would have a modern equivalent value of somewhere between 10 and 15 billion US dollars. Furthermore, since the weight of a talent has been estimated at around 58 pounds, the 50 tons of gold and silver that Vespasian and his son Titus removed from the Temple in 70 CE would have a modern value of around 50 billion US dollars. Therefore, we may infer from all this that, at the time of the events described by Luke in the early part of Acts (i.e. 33 to 37 CE), the Temple treasury-bank held vast quantities of gold and silver on deposit – as well as other valuable assets – worth many, many billions of US dollars in today’s value.

10 Published online at <https://www.gov.uk/agricultural-workers-rights/pay-and-overtime>; accessed on March 30th 2022.

11 On that date, the pound-dollar exchange rate was 1.232; hence, GBP £1.00 was worth USD \$1.23.

12 Published online at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes452099.htm>; accessed on March 30th 2022.

13 Published online at <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes472061.htm>; accessed on March 30th 2022.

14 Viewed another way, since a talent represents 6,000 days’ wages (for a first-century agricultural or manual worker in Palestine), it is therefore equivalent to around 20 years’ salary for a modern manual labourer.

6.4 The Sadducee Elite: A Brood of Vipers?

The purpose of wealth is to acquire power. The purpose of power is to protect wealth.

HOCK, 2005:137

According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 7.3.3), the first mention of the Sanhedrin (συνέδριον, *synedrion*) occurs during the time of Antiochus the Great (233–187 BCE)¹⁵ and was referred to initially by the title of Γερουσία (*Gerousia*),¹⁶ which denotes a non-democratic body. Consequently, Schürer et al (1979:202–203) contend that this council consisted of aristocrats.¹⁷ We also have voluminous literature dealing with the council's two major factions, the Sadducees and Pharisees, who, according to Schürer et al (1979:404), "are known, in particular from the evidence of Josephus and the NT, to have been mutually hostile". These hostilities arose primarily from their theological differences;¹⁸ however, "Sharp economic and social differences added to the political controversies".¹⁹

From Esler (1987:171) we learn that, within the Roman Empire, members of the Sanhedrin were recognised as provincial gentry, known as Decurions.²⁰ He also cites the claim by Gag   (1971:163) that, in order to qualify for selection

15 According to Thayer's Lexicon, "The Jews trace the origin of the Sanhedrin to Numbers 11:16f." Citing Josephus (*Vita* 1), Sch  rer et al (1979:404) write that, "from the beginning of the Greek and even the Persian period, it was the priests and their aristocratic lay allies who ruled the Jewish state". They also state (1979:203) that the powers of the Sanhedrin at that time "must have been fairly extensive. For the Hellenistic kings left considerable freedom to the cities in internal affairs and were content as long as taxes were paid and their sovereignty acknowledged".

16 The original *Gerousia* was a Spartan council of elders created in the seventh century BCE by the lawgiver Lycurgus. It was a governmental body, specifically a gerontocracy (from γ  ρων, *geron*, 'an old man'), that consisted predominantly of 60-year old Spartan males. Hence, in LXX Exodus 3:16 and LXX Deuteronomy 19:12, *gerousia* is rendered as 'elders'; while in Acts 5:21, *gerousia* is rendered as 'senate' (  JV), from Latin: *senatus* (cf. *senex*, 'old'), 'Sanhedrin' (AMPC, NASB, NIV and RSV) and 'ancients' (DRA).

17 Bromiley (1995:302) likewise describes the *Gerousia* in Jerusalem as "aristocratic", made up of "elders" (e.g. Ezra 5:5, 9; 6:7, 14, etc.) and "nobles" (e.g. Nehemiah 2:16; 4:8, etc.).

18 For a comprehensive explanation of the theological differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees, see Sch  rer et al (1979:388–414) and also Jeremias (1969:229–232).

19 Sch  rer et al (1979:404) inform us that "The Sadducees, representatives of the priestly and lay aristocracy, had every reason to resist customs and belief evolved by the masses under the leadership of middle class and 'plebeian' intellectuals".

20 Decurions ranked third in the hierarchy of Roman aristocracy; above them were equestrians and then ultimately senators, the latter residing mainly in Rome. MacMullen (1974:88–99) informs us that, of the fifty million or so inhabitants of the Empire in Tacitus' day, the total percentage of provincial Decurions was around five per cent.

to the Decuriate, a candidate had to own property worth a minimum of 25,000 *denarii* – a sum that, in the first century CE, would take an agricultural labourer approximately 80 years to earn.²¹ Jeremias (1969:96) confirms that the lay members of the Sanhedrin were drawn from the wealthy classes and included “landowners, tax-farmers,²² bankers and men of private means”, along with “merchants dealing in grain, wine and oil, and wood”. He writes (1969:228) that “these privileged families were originally landowning families, as is shown by their supplies of natural products to the Temple”, and argues (1969:222–223) that the group of “elders” in the Sanhedrin were the heads of the most influential lay families. Jeremias also notes (1969:96) the reference to Joseph of Arimathea,²³ who he claims was a rich landowner,²⁴ since, in Mark 15:43, Joseph is described as εὐσχήμων (*euschēmōn*, ‘honourable’), and “the papyri make it clear that this means a wealthy landowner”. He further asserts that the councillor Nicodemus (John 3:1; 7:50; cf. 12:42) was also wealthy, based on the reference in John 19:39 that he brought a hundred Roman pound’s worth of ointments and spices for Jesus’ burial.

For reasons that will become clear, it is the Sadducees and their secular (i.e. economic and political) activities that concern us most in this study, and the rationale for this is quite simple. In the gospels, the initial confrontations between Christ and the religious authorities involve matters of doctrine; and the majority of these are instigated by Pharisees,²⁵ who we readily associate with disputes concerning doctrine and law. But then, after the “temple

21 Using our wage rate numéraire, this minimum patrimony for a Decurion, of 25,000 *denarii*, would be the equivalent of between USD \$4,953,000 and \$6,201,000 today.

22 As mentioned previously, the link between tax-farming and banking is widely recognised since people sometimes had to borrow money (usually from the tax-farmer) in order to pay their taxes. Unfortunately, as Gross (1975:16) reminds us, the tax-farmers (Latin: *publicani*), “who farmed the taxes against lump sums, as a rule exacted more than their due” (emphasis added).

23 Since Joseph of Arimathea was neither priest nor scribe, Jeremias (1969:223, n. 7) counts him amongst the group of “elders” in the Sanhedrin. Mark 15:43 and Luke 23:50 refer to him as a “member of the council”; however, in Luke, he is also described as a member of the Sanhedrin (AMPC, CSB, CJB, HCSB and OJB), the Jewish Supreme Court (TLB), a senator (JUB) and decurion (WYC).

24 Jeremias (1969:96) asserts that Joseph of Arimathea “was a rich man and owned a garden to the north of the city with a family grave hewn from the rock (John 19:41; cf. 20:15). The main part of his property would probably be in his native city, since the Jerusalem site had not been long in the possession of his family, for the grave was newly hewn”.

25 See Matthew 9:10–12, 32:1–2, 22–24, 38; 15:1–2; 16:1–4; 19:3; 22:15–22, 34–40; Mark 2:15–17, 23–24; 3:1–3; 7:1–3; 8:10–12; 10:1–2; 12:13–17; Luke 5:20–22, 29–31; 7:39; 11:36–39, 53–54; 14:1–3; 15:1–2; 17:20–21; 19:37–40; John 7:31–33; 8:2–4, 12–19; 9:13–14.

cleansing" episode,²⁶ which brought Christ into direct conflict with the vested, economic interests of the priestly and aristocratic lay members of the Sanhedrin, the main opposition to Jesus switches from the Pharisees to members or representatives of the Sadducee elite; in particular, the Chief Priest and the elders.²⁷ Likewise, in the early chapters of Acts, it is the Sadducees (especially the circle surrounding the High Priest)²⁸ who constitute the main opposition to the followers of Jesus – specifically, the sect leadership²⁹ – which supports further speculation that the primary reason for the post-Pentecost tension may be something other than doctrine.

According to Schürer et al (1979:404–405), the Sadducees emerged from the priestly circles and were "aristocrats, wealthy, and persons of rank", who "by virtue of their wealth and office held an influential position in civil life".³⁰ However, as Josephus informs us, their support came from just a small but elite sector of the Jewish community: "this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity" (*Antiquities* 18.1.4); also, "the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, [whereas] the Pharisees have the multitude on their side" (*Antiquities* 13.10.6). Hence, Schürer et al (1979:414) contend that, because of their small support-base, the Sadducees frequently had to play politics: "in the performance of their official functions they had to accommodate themselves to popular Pharisaic views"; otherwise, "the people would not have tolerated them".³¹ Likewise, Jeremias (1969:159) comments that "The high priests with Sadducean sympathies had to accustom themselves to withholding their views in council and to carrying out the Temple rites according to Pharisaic traditions".

26 Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17 and Luke 19:45–46.

27 See Matthew 21:23; 26:3–4; 27:1; Mark 11:18, 27; 14:1, 55; Luke 20:19; 22:2. According to Weber (1966:219), "In the Passion narrative the opponents of Jesus are not the Pharisees, or Sadducees, or scribes independently. Rather, they are the chief priest and the elders"; also mentioned by Moxnes (2004:14–15).

28 Jeremias (1969:229) reminds us that the high priest Joseph, surnamed Caiaphas (18–37 CE), was a Sadducee, and notes that "Acts 5:17 calls the Sadducees 'all they that were with him', i.e. with the high priest, who was then Caiaphas: Acts 4:6".

29 Moxnes (2004:161) confirms that "The opponents of the Apostles in Acts are greedy and avaricious, just as were the opponents of Jesus in [Luke's] Gospel".

30 Schürer et al (1979:405) suggest that the Sadducees (Σαδδουκαῖοι, *Saddoukaioi*) named their party after the high priest Zadok, whose descendants had held the priestly office in Jerusalem since Solomon's time. The name Zadok is derived from the Hebrew צדק (tsaddîq, 'just' or 'righteous').

31 This is a paraphrase of Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.1.4): "when [the Sadducees] become magistrates [...] they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them".

Originally, the position of High Priest, כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל (*kōhēn gādōl*), was hereditary; however, the Romans and Herodians discontinued this tradition for political reasons, and Schürer et al (1979:232–233) further explain that, “With the High Priests constantly changing, there were always a considerable number of them no longer in office”. Nonetheless, even when a High Priest no longer held the position, he apparently did not lose his prestige or power, as “It is clear from the NT that the elder Ananus or Annus enjoyed a great esteem even as a deposed High Priest [...] It therefore appears that removal from office in no way condemned these men to political inactivity”. We also learn from Schürer et al (1979:234) that the position of High Priest “was regarded as the prerogative of a few families”, and “the mere fact of belonging to one of the privileged families must have conferred a particular distinction”.³²

Jeremias (1969:49) reports that the high priestly families owned some of the shops in the temple court and carried on “a flourishing trade” (1969:31); he also maintains that their houses contained “great luxury” (1969:96–98).³³ From Josephus (*War* 2.246; 5.506), we learn that the High Priest Ananias lived in the upper part of Jerusalem, as did Annas and Caiaphas, according to tradition; and that Annas’ grave, in the south-east of the city, must have been a large construction dominating the district. And Schaller (1963, in Collins, 1983:139) informs us that, from the second century BCE onwards, the traditional tithe was no longer given to the Levites, but to the priests;³⁴ and the tithe of the tithe (i.e. a tithe of each priest’s income) therefore went to the High Priest – which would have represented a substantial income indeed. Finally, Jeremias (1969:49) confirms that the holder of the high-priestly office possessed private

32 Smallwood (1970:91) agrees that “The High Priesthood tended to be confined to members of a small group of families, and the current holder together with the ex-High Priests were known collectively as ‘the High Priests’”.

33 For instance, Jeremias (1969:96–98) informs us that, “The house where lived the ex-high priest Annas, father-in-law of the officiating high priest, to whom John says Jesus was first taken after his arrest (John 18:13), had a spacious court (John 18:15), a woman door-keeper (John 18:16) and other servants who belonged to the household (John 18:18, where the group who took Jesus prisoner is no doubt included. The officiating high priest, to whom Jesus was taken next, lived in a house large enough to accommodate an emergency session of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:66), and it apparently possessed a gate-house (Matthew 26:71; Mark 14:68). He had in his household a fair number of servants, both men and women”. Also, Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50 and John 18:10 report that servants of the high priest took part in the arrest of Jesus; so too Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54; Luke 22:55. Servants of the high priest are also mentioned in the *Tosephta Menahoth* xii.21, as well as Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.181, 206.

34 See also Walter (1976); in Collins, 1983:169, n.11.

means: "One had only to think of the Day of Atonement, when the high priest had to supply the sacrifice at his own expense".³⁵

In addition, Cassidy (1987:14) explains that, "As a means of fulfilling their objectives within a particular province, the Romans frequently enlisted the aid of indigenous leaders and leadership groups. In the furtherance of their aims the Romans were also prepared to grant the people of the conquered areas considerable latitude in their social, economic, religious and even political practices".³⁶ The Romans' primary objectives included the security of the empire and the regular payment of a large number of taxes, which (in Judea) was organised/controlled by members of the local Decuriate.³⁷ Interestingly, this latter activity would have created significant tension between the Sadducees and Pharisees who, we know from the gospel accounts, regarded tax collectors (and thus tax officials of all classes) as comparable to "sinners".³⁸ Jeremias (1969:228) writes that:

The [Roman] procurator was careful to choose his officials from among the 'elders' of the Sanhedrin and other heads of families – his tax officials, the *dekaprotai* (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.194).³⁹ These were charged with assessing the citizens liable to taxation, the tribute which Rome imposed on Judea, and guaranteed the correct payment from their own resources. This 'liturgical' office of the *dekaprotos* required men of considerable means,⁴⁰ principally men who were landowners, as we know in Egypt; this shows that the heads of patrician families, at any rate those with seats in the Sanhedrin, were men of great wealth.

35 See Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.10.2–3, cf. Leviticus 16:3.

36 This is confirmed by Rostovtzeff (1926:138) who explains that "The imperial bureaucracy very seldom interfered with local city affairs".

37 We learn from Stegemann and Stegemann (1999:116) that, in 47 BCE, Caesar forbade the collection of taxes in Judea by Roman *publicani*. In their place, as Josephus (*War*, 2.405 and 2.407) explains, local (Jewish) *archontes* and patricians were presented to the procurator for nomination as tax officials, and thus became responsible for collecting the taxes.

38 See Matthew 9:10, 11:19; Mark 2:16; and Luke 7:34, 15:1, 18:13. It is possible that the Pharisees' attitude towards the Sadducees influenced the later rabbinical view that any profession in which men handled money (e.g. shopkeepers or "lenders of money") would eventually corrupt that person and lead him to commit fraud; as mentioned in Agrell (1976:82 & 172, n. 82).

39 The *dekaprotai* were a fiscal council of ten: from *deka*, 'ten'; and *protos*, 'first; foremost (in time, place, order or importance)'.

40 Finley (1973:151) explains that the term 'liturgical' (from the Greek: *leitourgia*), which today refers to 'service to the divinity', originally meant 'work for the people', and subsequently 'service to the state'. Hence the ancient position of tax official was deemed a 'liturgical' office.

When Jesus “cleansed” the Temple and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the chairs (or seats) of those who sold doves, He said that “My house shall be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17);⁴¹ and, according to Thayer, ληστής (*lēstēs*) means ‘robber, plunderer, freebooter or brigand’.⁴² Hamilton (1966:372) queries this allegation and claims that the money-changers were providing a necessary service for the festal pilgrims, and were therefore not “robbers”. That may or may not be true concerning the *kollybistai*; however, with regard to the other traders in the temple precincts, Hamilton’s argument is contradicted to some degree by the account (in *Mishnah Kerithoth* 1.7) of sacrificial doves being sold to pilgrims at one hundred times their normal price.⁴³ Nevertheless, I again suggest that Hamilton has missed the point of Jesus’ actions, since it can be argued that He was not specifically directing His anger at the money-changers (or merchants) but at their commercial masters: the priestly Sadducee elite, whose record of duplicity and corruption is substantial.

For example, Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.6.1–2) describes the High Priest Onias as “a great lover of money”; hence, the historian was concerned that, because of his greed, Onias might “endure to see his country in danger [...] and his countrymen suffer the greatest damages”. But then, we learn from Schürer et al (1979:411) that the Sadducees rejected belief in a bodily resurrection and reward in a life to come; and it would appear that this particular theological perspective shaped their highly materialistic attitude and attendant lifestyle; as Rabbi Nathan (in Goldin, 1955:39) writes: “the Sadducees and Boethusians used silver vessels and gold vessels all their lives (because they denied the resurrection of the dead and thus wished to make the most of earthly life)”.⁴⁴ If so, it would explain why the priestly and lay aristocracy were willing to go to such great lengths to defend what Esler has referred to as their privileged position.

41 Jesus was quoting from Jeremiah 7:11.

42 See <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G3027&t=KJV>; accessed on March 27th 2009.

43 Cited by Jeremias (1969:120–121), who suggests that this exorbitantly-inflated price was justified on the basis of supply and demand. Nevertheless, he pours scorn on the merchants involved by calling them “profiteers”. See Chapter 2.2, *The initial tranche of converts*.

44 Luke 16:14 states that the Pharisees were likewise “covetous and lovers of money”, Greek: φιλάργυροι (*philargyroi*).

6.5 The 'Wicked Priests'

Schürer et al (1979:215) claim that "The unanimous testimony of Josephus and the NT is that the High Priest was always President of the Sanhedrin [...] and, in the Roman period, Josephus expressly indicates that the High Priests were also the political heads of the nation". Jeremias (1969:148) confirms this, writing that "Israel at the time of Jesus was a pure theocracy, and the priesthood was the primary representative of the nobility. Thus the reigning head of the priests, in times when there was no king, was the most eminent member of the nation". Unfortunately, but perhaps predictably, the secular role of the priestly aristocracy meant that "Political issues and interests radically affected their whole attitude. But the more these took precedence, the more those of religion fell behind" (Schürer et al, 1979:412).

Edersheim (1997:69) states that "Originally the office of high-priest was regarded as being held for life and hereditary; but the troubles of later times made it a matter of cabal, crime, or bribery". From Josephus we learn of two incidents of bribery: firstly, when John, son of Levi, "corrupted with money" two legate-priests travelling with the historian, "who were very ready to take a bribe" (*Vita* 13); and, secondly, when Simon, son of Gamaliel, bribed Artanus, the high priest "and those with him" (*Vita* 39). Also, Gross (1975:17) contends that there was "much chicanery" in the collection of tithes by the powerful priestly families, who "used their political power to the disadvantage of their fellow priests".⁴⁵ Jeremias (1969:99, n. 39) mentions rivalry amongst the chief priests and informs us that nepotism (for financial gain) was rife: "this aristocracy appears to have been particularly interested in the Temple treasure and to have filled the post of Temple treasurer from the younger members of its families".⁴⁶ He also confirms (1969:196) that the authority and influence of the priestly aristocracy "depended on their power politics, exercised sometimes ruthlessly, sometimes by intrigue, and that by this means they were able to

45 Gross cites the account in Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.8.8; 20.9.2) when the servants of High Priest Ananias (47–59 CE) "went to the threshing floors and took away tithes that belonged to the priests by violence and did not refrain from beating such as would not give these tithes to them [...] so that priests that of old were wont to be supported with those tithes died for want of food". Jeremias (1969:98–99) also mentions a "plundering of the inferior priests", but cites the Mishnah (*Babylon Talmud Pesahim* 57a in the Baraita tradition), which refers to a different plundering of tithes from sycamore trees in Jericho.

46 See *Babylon Talmud Pesahim* 57a in the Baraita tradition; *Tosephta Menahoth* xii.21, 533. Citing the reference in Acts 4:5–6, Jeremias (1969:197) also explains that the ruling house of the former high priest Annas had almost all of the chief-priestly positions in its control: for example, his son-in-law was the reigning high priest, and his son captain of the Temple.

control the most important offices in the Temple as well as the taxes and the money". He also writes (1969:98) that, "Over and over again, e.g. 11 Macc. 4.7–10, 24, 32, we find records of the high-priestly office being bought, as in the case of Joshua b. Gamaliel (c. AD 63–65)".

In 11 Maccabees 4:7–10, we find a reference to "the surpassing wickedness of Jason" (4:10), who obtained the high priesthood by corruption (4:7),⁴⁷ and also by promising Antiochus Epiphanes between 360 and 440 talents of silver (4:8). Unfortunately, the agreed amount of money was delivered by Menelaus, who seized the opportunity to usurp Jason by offering the king an extra 300 talents (4:24).⁴⁸ 11 Maccabees 4:21–27 goes on to record the high priesthood of Menelaus who apparently possessed "no qualifications" to hold such an exalted office, and had "the hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage beast". He also reputedly "stole some of the gold vessels of the temple and gave them to Andronicus; other vessels, as it happened, he had sold to Tyre and the neighbouring cities" (4:32). Eventually, Menelaus was brought to trial, but he too resorted to bribery, and "because of the cupidity of those in power, remained in office, growing in wickedness, having become the chief plotter against his fellow citizens" (4:50).

Finally, in *Pesher Habakkuk* (from Qumran), there is a reference to "the Wicked Priest", whose heart became proud "when he ruled over Israel" (1QpHab 8.9–10) and who "robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence who rebelled against God, and took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself" (1QpHab 8.11–12). This not only illustrates the alleged crimes of "the Wicked Priest", but also implies that this particular person (or persons) wielded great political power and thus appears to be describing one or more men who held the position of High Priest.⁴⁹ In addition, according to Puech (2004:86), the Damascus Document from Qumran (CD 3.12)⁵⁰ contains a similar reference to "the wicked priests serving in the Temple", which appears to be alluding to a succession of six High Priests: Judas, Alcimus, Jonathan, Simon, John Hyrcanus, and Alexander Hyrcanus.

47 According to 11 Maccabees 4:7 (KJV), Jason "laboured underhand to be high priest".

48 Jerusalem *Talmud Yoma* i.1, 38c and 43 also describe how the candidates for the chief priestly office bid against each other; cited in Jeremias, 1969:159, n. 38.

49 As stated by Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.10.1). Magness (2003:37) agrees that "The term Wicked Priest refers to a high priest, since the name is a transparent play on words: *haKohen haRasha* (the wicked priest) for *haKohen haRosh* (the high priest)".

50 The prefix "CD" stands for "Cairo Damascus" and refers to the medieval copies of the Damascus Document (tenth to twelfth century CE) discovered in the Ben Ezra synagogue in Old Cairo in 1896, and published by Solomon Schechter in 1910 in a volume entitled *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*; as mentioned by Magness (2003:25).

6.6 Essene Precedent and Sadducee Paranoia

Esler writes (1987:21) that the growth of a sect “raises the possibility of drawing further members out of the church and, eventually, even threatening its continued separate existence altogether”. Specifically, a new sect will seriously threaten the existence of the established church if its growth deprives the church of increasing amounts of income and other financial resources that it would normally expect to receive from members of the defecting group, which was precisely the scenario that the Sadducee elite in Jerusalem saw unfolding before their eyes, on a daily basis in the Temple precincts.

Thus, when Acts 2:45 states that various members of the primitive church community sold their valuable possessions, it is possible that a significant portion of those possessions may have originally been deposited for safekeeping in the Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem. Consequently, in order to sell those valuables, their owners would first have to withdraw them from the Temple treasury, which would have alerted and possibly alarmed those who controlled it. Also, as mentioned previously, Stegemann (1998:72) claims that the Temple in Jerusalem levied a tax on deposits; consequently, any significant withdrawal of valuable assets would have deprived the Temple of a sizeable portion of this income. Furthermore, I suggest that the Sadducee elite had valid and well-established reasons for their concerns of losing a substantial portion of Temple-centric revenues in this manner. After all, at the time of the events depicted in Acts 2 to 8, they had already experienced a significant loss of assets and income that would normally have benefitted the Temple treasury-bank, as a result of the separation of the Essene sect who had been withholding their tithes and other financial support from the Temple for more than 180 years: since their separation from the temple during the rule of Jonathan the Hasmonean in 152 BCE. In fact, according to Puech (2004:87), there are numerous examples of authors who “show the Essene restrictions concerning participation in the Jerusalem treasury”.⁵¹

The Essene sect arose out of pious Jewish reaction to the failure of the Hasmoneans to restore the traditional high priesthood after they retook

51 For example, J. M. Baumgarten, “Halakhic Polemics in New Fragments from Qumran Cave 4”, in J. Amatai (ed.), *Biblical Archeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archeology, Jerusalem, April 1984* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; ASOR, 1985), pp. 390–399; and E. and H. Eshel, “4Q471 Fragment 1 and Ma ‘amadot in the War Scroll”, in J. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner (eds.), *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18–21 March, 1991* (2 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill; Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1992), II, pp. 611–620.

Jerusalem and purified the Temple in 164 BCE.⁵² Instead, they installed members of their own family as a new and royal priesthood; first with Jonathan (160–142 BCE), followed by Simon (142–134 BCE). This action, as Crossan (1999:459) argues, was for some Jews “worse than the Syrian persecution itself. If the high priest was illegitimate, how could the Temple service be valid, the covenant between people and God be maintained, and the linkage between earth and heaven be certified”? Based on his interpretation of the different statutes listed in the *Rule of the Community* and the *Damascus Document*, Vermes (1985:87, 106) argues that the sect was organised as “a single religious movement with two branches”; namely, “a kind of monastic society” plus “an ordinary lay existence”. This is supported by Josephus’ description of a group of Essenes consisting of adult celibate men, as well as “another order of Essenes” who marry and have children (*War* 2.160–161; cited in Magness, 2003:43).

Ownership of the kind of fortune that would create a problem for the Sadducee elite (if it were to be withdrawn or withheld from the temple treasury) does not seem to tally with the Essenes’ reputation for being what Golb (1980:5) calls a “wealth-eschewing” community. In fact, the Essenes referred to themselves as *ebyonim*, ‘the poor ones’; and Josephus (*War* 2.8.3) actually describes them as “despisers of riches”. However, while we know that this degree of asceticism was practised by individual Essenes, it would not preclude the sect from possessing great wealth at the corporate level, as we find with later monastic groups, where members took individual vows of poverty while the orders corporately held valuable assets and owned considerable wealth. That’s why, even though, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.1.5), the Essenes held all goods in common, Puech (2004:87) informs us that, according to 1QpHab 12:8–9, “the ‘poor’ despoiled ones (the Essenes) are supposed to possess significant goods”. He also states (2004:86) that “several of [the Essenes] were priests, starting with the Teacher of Righteousness, and they were therefore entitled to receive their own share of tithes, gifts and goods, whether they were consecrated or not. Such portions may have been sent to them by those who supported them from the beginning and/or who did not wish to make a donation to the wicked priests (CD 3.12) serving in the Temple, which had been defiled since the time of the high priesthood of Jonathan”.

52 The Essenes are mentioned in Philo (*Hypothetica: Apology for the Jews*; extant only in Eusebius’ *The Preparation for the Gospel* 11.1–18), Josephus (*War* 2.119–161 and *Antiquities* 18.18–22), and also Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*). The Essene communal centre at Qumran was excavated between 1946 and 1956, and their hidden library recovered from eleven caves nearby.

All this gives rise to some interesting speculation. As mentioned above, at the time under review, the Essene sect had been in existence for something like 180 years and, during that time, had amassed around 4,000 members.⁵³ On the other hand, in less than three and a half years, the new sect of Jesus-Believers had grown to something approaching double that size.⁵⁴ Therefore, if members of the primitive church community also chose to withdraw and/or withhold funds from the Temple treasury-bank, which is a distinct possibility, the Sadducee elite would have perceived this as a much greater and thus more serious threat to the welfare of the Temple-centric economy than that posed by the Essenes. Also, because “a large number of priests were obedient to the [new] faith” (Acts 6:7), members of the primitive church congregation would quite likely have been encouraged to follow another Essene precedent and present their tithes and offerings directly to any priests who were fellow-members of the new sect – which would have deprived the Temple authorities of a significant portion of their personal income. No wonder the Sadducees reacted forcefully.

53 The number of members of the Essene community is estimated by Philo as “over 4,000 according to my judgment” (*Quod omnis probus liber*, Par. 12); and by Josephus as “about 4,000 men” (*Antiquities* 18.1.5); cited in Golb (1980:6).

54 As mentioned previously, Luke tells us that, within three to three and a half years, the nascent sect grew to the point where “the number of disciples had multiplied greatly” (Acts 6:7) beyond “a multitude” (6:2) that was reputedly greater than “5,000” (4:4). Therefore, after three or three and a half years of dramatic growth, a congregation of 7,000 to 8,000 is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

The Martyrdom of Stephen

7.1 Freedmen and Their Economic Importance

To understand the wider implications of the callous attack against Stephen, we need to examine the circumstances in which it began, and also the background of the main protagonists involved: i.e. as a disputation with “some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen” (Acts 6:9).¹ It is also the freedmen who, once they realise that they have lost their dispute with Stephen, proceed to “incite the people, as well as the elders and scribes” (6:12).

As a group, freedmen are relegated to something of a minor footnote in the NT literature; however, that is not the case within the economic history of the Roman Empire, in which, colloquially speaking, they are considered major players. In fact, Andreau (1999:157) claims that “the role of slaves and freedmen in commerce, manufacture and financial life has increasingly been seen as one of the defining characteristics of Roman society”.² Apparently, the social status of the Roman elite (i.e. senators in particular; also some equestrians) did not allow them to carry out any kind of professional or regular commercial activity.³ As a consequence, it was the slaves and freedmen of the aristocracy who acted as their agents and bankers, and therefore handled all their day-to-day financial activities.⁴ Furthermore, Pliny the Elder cites evidence of the extraordinary

- 1 Bruce (1990:187) explains that “A *libertinus* [Greek: *libertinos*] was either a *libertus* (‘freedman’) or the son of a *libertus* (cf. Seutonius, *Claudius* xxiv.1)”. According to Schürer et al (1979:248, n. 8), Stephen’s opponents were Roman freedmen, descended from Jews sent by Pompey as prisoners to Rome, and soon liberated (cf. Philo, *Leg. ad Gaium* 155).
- 2 Crossan (1999:181) has suggested that, in the first century CE, the number of freedmen (or “freed citizens”) might have been as high as 80 per cent of the citizens of the Roman Empire. But since Augustus’ census of 4 CE (*Res gestae* 8.3–4) reports that Roman citizens numbered 4,937,000 (cited in Finley, 1973:47), this would put the number of freedmen at the time at around 3.9 million – which does not sound plausible. Nevertheless, it was obviously a sizeable number; therefore, even if a much smaller percentage were involved in money-lending or other forms of banking, it would still make freedmen a significant economic force within the empire.
- 3 Badian (1972:50) states that senators were “forbidden by law and tradition” to engage in commerce; and Andreau (1999:23) adds that “A senator or a knight was never a professional man in the way that an *argentarius* was”.
- 4 For example, we have a report from Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.6.3) that, when Herod Agrippa was in Ptolemais and needed money to sail to Italy, he instructed his freedman, Marsyas, to negotiate a loan of 20,000 drachmas from Peter, the freedman of his mother, Bernice.

levels of personal wealth it was possible for freedmen to attain whilst handling the commercial affairs of the elite. In particular, he mentions (*Natural History* 33.134) two examples of imperial freedmen, Narcissus and Pallas, who each reputedly accumulated fortunes of over 400 million sesterces.⁵

Andreau (1999:47–48) informs us that, in the first century CE, many of the professional bankers and financiers were freedmen, and also that freedmen often belonged to the upper echelons of this group.⁶ He writes that, between the time of Caesar and the first half of the second century CE, “Half the *coactores* and half the *argentarii* [money-receivers and deposit bankers] known to us are explicitly stated to be freedmen; and half the known *coactores argentarii* and *nummularii* [money-changers/assayers] were definitely or almost definitely freedmen”. It would appear that most of these freedmen-bankers operated in Italy, obviously making the most of business connections formed during the years in servitude to their former Roman masters. However, Luke’s reference in Acts indicates that a group of them were also residing and presumably operating commercially in Jerusalem during the immediate post-Pentecost period, which is supported by a possible attestation for the existence of a synagogue associated with freedmen in Jerusalem at that time.⁷

5 Roman slaves were also able accumulate personal wealth. Andreau (1999:65) explains that an *actor* or a *dispensator* (treasurer) was in a position to run some personal business in parallel to his master and sometimes make money for himself by doing so. In fact, the possibilities of enrichment were so great, Pliny (*Natural History* 7.129), for example, reports that one of Nero’s *dispensatores* purchased his manumission for the sum of 13 million sesterces. Also, Seutonius (*Otho* 5, 2) writes that a slave of Galba was willing to pay Otho a million sesterces for assisting him in becoming assigned as a *dispensator* for the Emperor.

6 For example, Suetonius (*Nero* 30) mentions a freedman by the name of Cercopithecus Paneros, who Andreau (1999:15) lists amongst a group of what he calls “high-flying *faeneratores*”: i.e. specialist money-lenders. Interestingly, he also mentions (1999:56–57) that, if a professional/artisan banker managed to ascend to elite status, his new social position required him to relinquish his trade. As a consequence, “The professions of bankers and money-lenders were [often] passed on to freedmen, but seldom to a son or an heir”.

7 According to Lüdemann (1989:83), “A Greek inscription found in Jerusalem shortly before World War I indicated, amongst other things, that the priest and synagogue president was Theodotus, son of Vettenu, and that a guest house and water supply for pilgrims had been connected to it. Perhaps this inscription is a reference to the *Libertini* (a Latin loan word, which denotes freed Jews) mentioned in [Acts] 6:9. The father of Theodotus has a Roman name, Vettenu, which he may have adopted after being freed, because he owed his freedom to a Roman member of the gens Vettina”. However, Runesson (2008:52) questions both the theory that Theodotus was a *libertinus* and also the possible association with the synagogue of Acts 6:9 with his argument that, “Such conjectures overlook the naming conventions of the period, which indicate that Theodotus was a free-born man who was *not* a Roman citizen (a manumitted slave of a Roman family was by law a citizen). It is thus more likely that Theodotus’ father was simply named after the Vettini (or Vettieni) out of gratitude for some

Having said that, their possible numbers and implicit level of power and influence in the Judean capital depends on the particular commentator's interpretation of the Greek text in Acts 6:9. For example, according to Bruce (1990:187), "More probably one synagogue only is intended: 'the Synagogue of the Freedmen, comprising both Cyrenaeans and Alexandrians and those from Cilicia and Asia' (καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας being together, not separately, epexegetic of Λιβερτίνων)".⁸ This would suggest that there were a significant number of freedmen in Jerusalem, leading to further speculation that their synagogue may have been the hub of an important network of Jewish freedmen groups throughout the Diaspora, with the obvious commercial/banking implications. This is supported by Tacitus (*Annals* 2.85), who reports that there were many freedmen amongst the Jews in the Roman Empire.⁹

On the other hand, Schneider (1980:435, n. 19) and Lüdemann (1989:79) assert that the repeated article *ton* after *tines* divides the members listed in Acts 6:9 into two groups. Marshall (1980:112) and Talbert (1997:76) agree, explaining that the Greek construction favours two synagogues: one for the first three groups listed (Freedmen, Cyrenians and Alexandrians), and one for the remaining two (Cilicians and Asians). If correct, this would reduce the possible number of freedmen involved, but not necessarily dilute their potential influence, either locally or outside Jerusalem. In fact, given the importance of the Egyptian grain trade to both the Roman Empire and the Jews of the Diaspora, I find it highly significant that even the possible separation into two synagogues places Roman freedmen-bankers and Alexandrian merchants within the same congregation. However, Luke tells us that Saul-Paul was "consenting to [Stephen's] death" (Acts 8:1); and also that he was "from Tarsus in Cilicia" (21:39). And, according to Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:68), also Bruce (1970:157), it is possible that Paul may have been a *libertinus*, if his father or remoter ancestor

unspecified kindness to his family". Runesson also mentions that the original date of the inscription (i.e. Second Temple period) was challenged by Kee (1990:8), who assigned a date of two to three centuries later. In response, several scholars, particularly Reisner (1995:192–200) and Kloppenborg (2000:243–280), re-examined both the monument's paleography and the archaeological context of its recovery, which confirmed the pre-70 CE dating.

8 Barrett (1994:323) likewise suggests that "perhaps the greatest probability" is that "Luke had only one synagogue in mind, and that all groups shared in it".

9 Tacitus is reporting on a senatorial debate about "expelling the Egyptian and Jewish worship" that resulted in a resolution being passed to transport "four thousand of the freedmen class who were infected with those superstitions and were of military age" to Sardinia, while "The rest were [ordered] to quit Italy". Also, Runesson et al (2008:45) cite Philo to inform us that "During the first century BC, many Jews had been enslaved and brought to Rome as war prisoners. Later manumitted, they became Roman citizens".

gained his Roman citizenship by manumission. If true, this would undermine the argument that Cilicians and freedmen attended separate synagogues; and thus support the suggestion that there was a single synagogue that was attended by Jewish freedmen of all four nationalities listed in Acts 6:9.

Literary evidence from this period, in the form of the Murecine tablets, offers proof that freedmen performed roles and functions normally associated with banking, and also confirms the link between Roman freedmen-bankers and Alexandrian grain merchants. These tablets, found at Puteoli, date from 26 to 62 CE and belonged to the Suplicii, a group of financiers operating out of this major Roman port located near Pompeii. Andreau (1999:73) asserts that the four Caii Suplicii mentioned in the archive were in all likelihood a circle of freedmen, as suggested by their names: Faustus, Cinnamus, Eutychus and Onirus. He further argues that, "Whether the Suplicii [of Puteoli] were bankers, or money-lenders but not bankers, there can be no doubt of the commercial nature of some of the loans that they advanced".¹⁰ Of particular significance are Andreau's findings concerning the extent of this group's financial dealings, and also the social standing of their clients. He writes (1999:74) that "the tablets of Murecine indicate that members of the entourage of the Emperor and of the entourages of a number of senators were investing money through the financiers of Puteoli". Also, "Several imperial slaves or freedmen are cited as lending money either to the Suplicii or to traders operating in Puteoli".

Puteoli (now known as Pozzuoli), a city on the coast of Campania, just north of the Bay of Naples, was the great emporium for the grain ships from Alexandria, but is perhaps better known as the port where the apostle Paul landed in Italy,¹¹ and from where he commenced his 170-mile journey to Rome via the Appian Way (Acts 28:13–16). During this period, Alexander the *alabarch*, the powerful Jewish merchant-financier from Alexandria, had business agents or perhaps even an office in the port; and Rathbone (2007:311) informs us that it is from Puteoli that Alexander organised to hand over 170,000 drachmas to Herod Agrippa, which was the balance of a 200,000 drachma loan that Herod

10 Camodeca (1992:29–36) argues that the Suplicii were *argentarii*. However, while Andreau (1995:76) agrees that one of the group, Cinammus, was a professional/artisan banker, he prefers to categorise them collectively as money-lenders (*faeneratores*); no doubt, based on evidence (1995:55) of a maritime loan in the Suplicii archive.

11 Acts 27–28 explains that Paul's passage to Puteoli was undertaken in two different ships from Alexandria. He boarded the first ship at Myra, in Lycia (27:5–6), which Luke's text implies was a grain ship, since it ran into a storm and, to lighten the load, the crew proceeded to "throw the wheat overboard" (27:38). The Greek for 'wheat', σῖτος (*sitos*), also means 'grain', which is how it is rendered in this verse by the MSG and NIV. Paul later took a second Alexandrian ship from Malta (28:11) where it had been forced to spend the winter.

secured (with the help of his wife, Cypros) in Alexandria in 35 CE.¹² Therefore, when Luke writes in Acts 2:10 that the crowd listening to Peter at Pentecost contained Jews from Egypt, as well as Jewish “transient residents from Rome” (AMPC), who were perhaps Roman citizens residing in Jerusalem,¹³ it is possible that this section of the crowd may have included freedmen who were bankers or financiers previously operating in either Puteoli or Rome,¹⁴ and who quite likely also had ongoing commercial connections with their co-religionists amongst the wealthy merchants in Alexandria – through the international financing activity associated with the all-important Roman grain trade, amongst other things.

This kind of commercial background detail arouses our suspicions that the attack against Stephen was *not* motivated exclusively by doctrinal reasons, as traditional exegesis has led us to believe. An alliance between Jewish freedmen-bankers and the Sadducee elite, who included wealthy grain merchants,¹⁵ would have undoubtedly produced a joint response to what was perceived by both parties as a threat to their respective but interdependent economic powerbases – from a rival banking facility controlled by the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*. Luke’s text suggests that the situation was serious enough for the freedmen to go beyond simply “debating and disputing” with Stephen, to the point where they were willing to resort to the use of false witnesses, in order to bring him before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:11–13) and entice the crowd at the same time. All this provides support for asserting that the reasons for their attack against Stephen might have been driven primarily by commercial rivalry, rather than just doctrinal differences.

7.2 Killing off the Competition?

If we accept Luke’s order of names as an indication of rank, Stephen was the head *trapezitēs*,¹⁶ a man full of faith [and wisdom] and full of and controlled by

12 Rathbone is quoting Josephus *Antiquities* 18.6.3. According to Evans (1995:579), Alexander gave 5 talents (30,000 drachmas) to Agrippa in Alexandria. For more details, see Chapter 11.8, *Possible links with powerful groups in Alexandria*.

13 As mentioned previously, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:20) argue that “Ῥωμαῖος regularly means a citizen of the Roman Empire, not an inhabitant of the city of Rome (cf. Acts 22:25ff.)”.

14 Interestingly, Deissman (1927:441) suggests that the freedmen attending the synagogue in Jerusalem came from the Imperial household.

15 As mentioned in Jeremais (1969:96).

16 According to Kollmann (2004:26), in the list of names in Mark 3:16–19; also Acts 6:5 & 13:1, the most important person is placed first.

the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5), and also highly intelligent and educated (6:9–10). In fact, he exhibited so much wisdom his opponents “were not able to resist the intelligence and the wisdom and [the inspiration of] the Spirit with which and by Whom he spoke” (6:10). Lüdemann (1989:79) links this to the promise of Christ to His followers, as mentioned in Luke 21:15: “For I will give you a mouth and a wisdom (*sofia*), which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand (*antistēnai*) or contradict”, which is mentioned by Johnson and Harrington (1992:142) as well.

Lüdemann (1989:84–85) further speculates that the dispute arose in one of the Hellenist synagogues that Stephen attended, which again raises our suspicions; specifically, concerning the timing of the attack against him. According to Johnson and Harrington (1992:106), in Acts 6:3, which contains the list of personal attributes required for selection as one of the Seven, the Greek verb μαρτυρουμένους (*martyroumenous*, ‘to be a witness, to bear witness, i.e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something’) can be interpreted as “having one’s actions or character witnessed by others” (see Luke 4:22; Acts 10:22; 16:2; 22:12; also 1 Timothy 5:10 and 3 John 12). This implies that, prior to the point when the so-called problem of the Hellenist widows became an issue, Stephen had already demonstrated that he was “full of the Holy Spirit” (6:3) and “full of faith” (6:5); and had also exhibited a superior level of intelligence and wisdom (6:10). Consequently, if Stephen did not hide his new beliefs and loyalties whilst attending this particular synagogue in the post-Pentecost period – and, based on his invective against the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, it is doubtful that he did – he would have been a growing thorn in the side of his fellow synagogue members for some time prior to the dispute.

So what changed? What was the trigger point that prompted the freedmen, in particular, to expend time, energy and perhaps even money, and attack Stephen in such an underhanded and nefarious way? Given the timing of the attack, the most obvious answer is his appointment as head *trapezitēs* of the rival banking facility, which further supports the argument that the attack was economically-motivated. Of significant interest is the assertion by Pearson (1986:209–210) that Stephen (and others of the Seven) came from Alexandria, which, along with Lüdemann’s conjecture concerning Stephen’s attendance (and thus potential membership) of the synagogue where the dispute occurred, gives rise to speculation that Stephen himself may have been a freedmen, or the son of a freedmen, and thus perhaps a banker involved in financing the all-important Roman grain trade between Alexandria, Italy and Palestine. In fact, because the verb ἐπισκέψασθε (*episkepsasthe*) in Acts 6:3, means to ‘inspect, examine with the eyes’, this implies that, sometime before the events depicted in Acts 6:1–5, Stephen had also demonstrated *publicly* that

he possessed the knowledge and skills required to fulfil the task for which he was selected by the multitude; namely, ‘to serve in the bank’. As a consequence, speculation concerning his possible status as a freedman-banker appears highly plausible – which may also help explain why he was chosen for the position of leader amongst the Seven.

Their defeat in the dispute with Stephen (Acts 6:9–10) led the freedmen to further action that is also relevant to this study. Acts 6:11 states that they “suborned” men to falsely accuse the head *trapezitēs*; and, according to Thayer, the verb ὑποβάλλω (*hypoballō*) means ‘to instruct privately, instigate, to bribe or induce (someone) unlawfully or secretly to perform some misdeed or commit a crime’.¹⁷ Then, in Acts 6:12, this same group is seen to “agitate the people”. Now, because the statutory procedure for stoning (the capital punishment for blasphemy) required the witnesses “to take the leading part in the execution” (Bruce, 1990:212),¹⁸ I would argue that these false witnesses – and also those who engaged or suborned them – were not ignorant of the consequences of their intended actions: namely, that they would be required to participate directly, if not physically, in the death of Stephen if and when their false claims saw him convicted and sentenced.

That constitutes premeditated murder on the part of the false witnesses and also conspiracy to murder on the part of the freedmen – as well as their allies, the leaders of the Sanhedrin; although the guilt of this latter group cannot be proven, even though Johnson and Harrington (1992:142) accuse the Sanhedrin of being Stephen’s killers. From this we may infer that the freedmen paid the false witnesses enough money to make it worth their while to commit both perjury and premeditated murder, which in turn means that the removal of Stephen (as a possible commercial rival) was worth a great deal to this particular group of freedmen-bankers and their allies. However, the first Christian martyr is perhaps best remembered for the content and length of his speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1–53), which, when analysed alongside the circumstances surrounding this episode, offers significant insights into the economic and political motivation for the persecution of the *Hellenistae*. Without a doubt, this was a truly extraordinary trial; one that was not conducted under the correct protocols of either Roman or Jewish law.

According to Foakes Jackson (1930:165), “a Roman procurator like Pilate would not condemn even a criminal who was not a citizen, without some show of justice or formality”. And Thayer explains that “a capital [i.e. death] sentence

17 See <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5260&t=KJV>, accessed on May 17th 2009.

18 See *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6:4.

pronounced by the Sanhedrin [*synedrion*, G4892] was not valid unless it were confirmed by the Roman procurator (*cf.* John 18:31; Josephus, *Antiquities* 20, 9, 1).¹⁹ This is why Foakes Jackson and Lake (1922:86), and other scholars such as Barrett (1994:382), believe that Stephen was arraigned before the Sanhedrin during the period known as the interregnum; sometime between the recall of Pilate to Rome and the arrival of his successor, when there was no procurator governing Palestine: i.e. between late 36 and early 37 CE. After all, if Stephen was a Roman citizen (which his possible status as either a freedman or son of a freedman would have granted him), it would have been extremely difficult if not impossible for the Sadducee elite to successfully prosecute the kind of “rough justice” recorded in Acts 7 while a Roman procurator was around to protect him. Interestingly, Luke’s account in Acts 18:12–16, of when the Jews brought proceedings against Paul before Gallio, the Roman proconsul of Achaia, provides us with an excellent example of how the presence of a Roman governor would have frustrated the Sanhedrin’s plans to deal with Stephen, if he were a Roman citizen.¹⁹

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of Jewish law, it would seem that the Sanhedrin conveniently forgot about the strict protocols laid down later in the rabbinical literature for cases involving a capital sentence (e.g. *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:1, 5:5); particularly in the pronouncement of judgement.²⁰ For instance, if the accused was acquitted, the result was to be pronounced on the day of the trial itself; whereas, a guilty sentence was not to be pronounced until the day after – which definitely does not match the haste with which Stephen was dispatched. Barrett (1994:385) comments that, in Stephen’s case, the proceedings are not those of a reputable (Jewish) court, while Bruce (1970:179) finds it difficult to decide whether Stephen’s execution was indeed an instance of excess of jurisdiction on the part of the Sanhedrin or an example of justifiable mob violence: i.e. a righteous form of “vigilante justice”, which Penner (2004:33) argues was endorsed by Philo.²¹ Finally, Foakes Jackson and

19 After hearing from the Jewish plaintiffs, Gallio dismissed the case against Paul because he declined to exercise his jurisdiction on matters that exclusively concerned Jewish doctrine or law.

20 As argued previously, the *Mishnah*, written between 180 and 200 CE, need not be excluded from being used to examine events in the first century CE, since Joseph the Patriarch was merely codifying the oral tradition dating back to Ezra and the fourth century BCE.

21 Penner also cites support from Seland (1995:224). In *Special Laws* 1: 54–57 (trans. by C. D. Yonge, 1854–55), Philo urges pious Jews “to inflict all such punishment [on a blasphemer] out of hand without any delay, not bringing them before either any judgment seat, or any council, or any bench of magistrates” – even if it requires them to take the law into their own hands: i.e. “looking upon themselves as everything for the time being, counsellors, and judges, and generals, and members of the assembly, and accusers, and witnesses, and

Lake (1922:85) maintain that even the way in which Stephen was stoned did not follow the rules. As mentioned above, Bruce (1990:212) reports that “It was the duty of the witnesses to take the leading part in the execution”. He also writes that “The drop from the place of stoning was twice the height of a man. One of the witnesses pushes the criminal from behind, so that he falls face downward. He is then turned over on his back. If he dies from the fall, that is sufficient. If not, he is stoned by all the congregation of Israel, as it is written (Deuteronomy 17:7): ‘The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people’ (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6.3f.)”.

Much has been written about what was contained in Stephen’s so-called defence speech, and also what was supposedly left out. And for an analysis of the trial from a legal viewpoint, I recommend Watson (1996), a law professor, and Esler (1987:124–125, 134–135, 140, 203–204), a former barrister/lawyer turned theologian; although, I disagree with some of their conclusions, which have been reached without the benefit or consideration of a banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, or Stephen’s possible position as head *trapezitēs* of the bank. Essentially, Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of idolatry in their extreme reverence for the Temple, and also claimed that, according to scripture, Yahweh was prepared to dwell amongst and be worshipped by His people in various locations – not exclusively in Jerusalem. In other words, Stephen attacked the Temple (as being made into an idol of sorts); and he also attacked the Sanhedrin (for their role as promoters and/or perpetrators of the idolatry),²² which means that his speech specifically targeted the theological and political justification for the Temple “cash cow” that, according to Sanders (1992:124), “directly or indirectly generated most of the city’s business”.

Barrett (1994:391) describes the Hellenist Jesus-Believers’ attitude to the Temple as “radical”, as we might expect from devout followers of Jesus, since He once referred to Himself, albeit obliquely, as being “greater than the Temple”

laws, and the people; that so, since there is no conceivable hindrance, they may with all their company put themselves forward fearlessly to fight as the champions of holiness”. However, the introduction to this passage makes it clear that Philo is referring to blasphemy committed by Gentiles and/or proselytes – not by Jews. On that basis, it would appear that the outcome of Stephen’s trial was indeed, as Bruce suggests, “an instance of excess of jurisdiction on the part of the Sanhedrin”, particularly since they did not have the authority to proceed with a capital punishment without the approval of a Roman procurator.

22 Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:81) suggest that “in attributing permanent sanctity to the Temple the Jews were verging on idolatry”.

(Matthew 12:6). Foakes Jackson and Lake (1920:69), Esler (1987:124–125, 134–135, 140) and also Watson (1996:38, 42, 143), all verify that Stephen, in particular, was *anti-temple*, while Cassidy (1987:34–35, n. 26) states that he was also *anti-Sanhedrin*.²³ However, I find Esler particularly instructive regarding an important aspect of Stephen's speech; namely, when Stephen declares that "the Most High does not live in dwellings made by human hands" (Acts 7:48). He explains (1987:134) that, "in the Septuagint, the word here used for a dwelling 'made by hand', *cheiropoiētos*, is reserved exclusively for pagan idols, and that it is reminiscent of the words Stephen has used [previously] for the golden calf (Acts 7:41)". In support, Esler quotes Hatch and Redpath (1897:1467), who cite fourteen instances of *χειροποίητος* (*cheiropoiētos*) in the LXX; all of them used of idols. Likewise, Johnson and Harrington (1992:133) confirm that "The phrase 'works of hands' is used in the LXX for idols (e.g. LXX Isaiah 16:12)"; however, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:81) extend that notion to cover temples as well.²⁴

Finally, Esler argues (1987:140) that, "In Jerusalem, of course, opposition to the Temple could be expected to raise a great deal of the most profound Jewish antipathy, for the reason that the whole socio-economic well-being of the city depended on the wealth attracted to it for the continuation of the Temple cult". Therefore, based on the above, I suggest that the Sanhedrin had no alternative but to get rid of this particularly troublesome *trapezitēs*; however, for the moment, all they could do was to "grind their teeth" at him and his verbal attacks (Acts 7:54). But then, as we read just two verses later, his articulation of the blasphemous content of his vision gave them the excuse they were looking for.

23 Interestingly, Lüdemann (1989:88) points out that "The call to repentance which features in the other mission sermons in Acts is missing from Stephen's speech", from which we might infer that Stephen perhaps did not think the ruling elite capable of repenting; or worse, he had pre-judged them worthy of divine punishment. Also, Peter's assertion that the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon all flesh at Pentecost implies that, in the eyes of many members of the nascent sect, the incumbent religious leadership of Jerusalem no longer held claim to any kind of special spiritual status and/or authority.

24 They write that *cheiropoiētos* "is used most frequently of idolatrous temples, and has a clearly derogatory implication".

Other Passages in Acts 2 to 8 with Commercial Connotations

8.1 All Things in Common

And all who believed (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ) were united and [together] they had everything in common.

Acts 2:44

According to Countryman (1980:1), the debate over the historical accounts dealing with the reputed practice of communal property in the primitive and early church, and its merits versus private property, “has called forth a great deal of literature over the last century and a quarter, largely because it has been caught up in the modern collision between capitalism and communism. Apologists for a variety of political tendencies have sought to use the early Christians as champions of their own or whipping boys for the opponents’ point of view”.¹ However, it is not my intention here to go over old ground and become embroiled in what is by now perhaps an overworked debate. Instead, I intend to explore this important and controversial question from a different perspective, utilising my professional knowledge of banks and banking practice, and also through an examination of the following points: firstly, the possibility that first-century Jewish practice if not law did not permit a man to dispose of more than 20 per cent of his “means” in acts of religious piety, even if it was on behalf of the poor; and secondly, an exploration of some of the historical accounts that describe the failure of socio-economic experiments of a communal or communistic nature, if that is in fact what Luke was describing.

Jeremias (1969:126–127) informs us that, although almsgiving played an important part in Jewish piety, “the evidence of contemporary literature does not allow the ‘all’ [of Acts 2:44 & 4:32] to be pressed too far. According to the Mishnah (*M. Arak.* viii.4), a man may devote only part of his means to the Temple, and to go further than this was not valid. This passage demonstrates that men were obliged to set a limit to their generosity. It had already been

1 In his introductory chapter, entitled “History of the Modern Discussion”, Countryman (1980:1–34) provides a comprehensive overview of the literature generated by this debate, starting with Johann Lorenz Mosheim in 1733, and finishing with Martin Hengel in 1974.

recognized as a precept in the first century AD that it was not permissible to spend more than a fifth of one's means on acts of charity (*J. Peah* i.1, 15b.23)". This is confirmed by Hengel (1974:20), who writes that the "surrender of one's own resources [was] taboo among the rabbis; to protect a man from making himself penniless a limit was put on the amount of alms to be given to the poor. The most a man could give was twenty per cent of his total income; the least, two or three per cent". In addition, Jeremias (1969:131) states that common ownership of goods in the primitive church has been a matter of considerable controversy; while Watson (1996:6) expresses doubt as to the extent of the activity, writing that "How complete this communism was is impossible to tell"; and, finally, Conzelmann (1987:24) suggests that Luke's portrayal should not be taken as historical.

From Countryman (1980:90) we gain some helpful insight that the early church authors were perhaps more interested in the polemic than the practice, since "none of [the early] authors except for Sextus seriously urged his readers to the practice of communism; nor is there any firm evidence that community of goods was ever normal within the church, *even in the primitive church in Jerusalem* (emphasis added).² Apologists described Christian almsgiving in communist terms in order to appeal to philosophically-minded pagans; moralists cast doubts on the validity of private property in order to encourage almsgiving. That is all".³ Thus, we are led to believe that Acts 2:44 and 4:32 were composed for propaganda purposes, and exploited by later Christian authors for fundraising reasons. With regard to the possible extent of the practice, Watson (1996:117–118) makes the point that, after Stephen's speech, "there is no talk of Christians holding all property in common"; and Hengel (1974:35) suggests that the voluntary nature of the activity may have ensured its demise, since "in the long run, the form of 'love communism' practised in Jerusalem was just not possible."⁴ It was impossible to maintain a sharing of goods in a free form, without the kind of fixed organisation and common production which we find, say, at Qumran".⁵ Furthermore, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:63)

2 Likewise, Hays (2010:208) contends that, "In the final analysis, we have no reason to think, either from alleged Essene parallels or the utopian overtones of the friendship language, that Luke describes the Jerusalem Christians as engaging in a community of possessions".

3 Interestingly, Seccombe (2022:204) explains that, in classical literature, "Community of possessions as a practical utopian ideal is seriously expressed only in the writings of Plato, and was subsequently criticized by Aristotle, and ridiculed by Aristophanes".

4 The phrase 'love communism' was coined by Ernst Troeltsch (1912).

5 According to Kollmann (2002:12), at Qumran, "the handing over of private property for communal ownership was firmly *institutionalized*" (emphasis added). He cites Philo, *Hyp.* 11:4; also Josephus, *War* 11:122, 124–127. On the other hand, Bloch (1959:1488) stresses "the spontaneous and voluntary character of this 'love communism' [within the primitive church]. It was

claim that the appointment of the Seven, in Acts 6:1–5, “is clearly intended by the writer to explain why the communistic experiment broke down”.

That aside, if we accept the existence of a banking facility (*trapeza*) operating within the primitive church community in Jerusalem, the silence from Luke on the above economic practice “after Stephen’s speech” gives rise to the following speculation. If a change in economic practice is linked in any way to Stephen’s death and the subsequent persecution of the Hellenist members of the congregation (Acts 7–8), then the mention of having “all things in common” may not be a reference to communism as such – especially since there is some agreement amongst commentators that this practice was voluntary⁶ – but to a form of community-centric capitalism that collapsed with the “scattering” of the Hellenist *trapezitai* who controlled it (Acts 8:1), and the demise of the community banking facility that acted as the clearing house and financing vehicle for all the transactions involved. Unfortunately, centuries of scholarly debate on the interpretation of ἅπαντα κοινά (*hapanta koina*) in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 has (once again) failed to explore the possible commercial connotations of this phrase, since κοινωνία (*koinōnia*) not only means ‘communion’ or ‘fellowship’, but also ‘association, partnership and joint-ownership’,⁷ which carries definite commercial implications. For instance, Cohen (1997:76, n. 71) informs us that, in fourth-century Athens, collective investment funds were commonly referred to (in the plural) as *koinōniai*;⁸ and individual ‘participants’ in these ventures were called *koinōnos*. Also, according to Seccombe (2022:207), Philo uses *koinōnia* to describe business partnerships (see *Mut.* 104; *Dec.* 171; *Spec. Leg.* 1:235, 12:75, 3:158, 4:30; *Gaium*, 47). Thus, Hays (2010:191) writes that:

not organized, nor was it subjected to external compulsion. The decisive thing was *koinōnia*, not organization”. Likewise, Barrett (1994:253) suggests that “it is probable that some kind of sharing was practiced in Jerusalem. It was probably not organized”.

- 6 Jeremias (1969:131, n. 19) notes that “Common ownership in the primitive church has been a matter of considerable controversy. The reasons that are cited against it do not seem to me to be convincing, provided it is remembered that the participation was voluntary”.
- 7 *Koinōnia* appears approximately 20 times in the NT, rendered predominantly as ‘fellowship’ (12x) and ‘communion’, including ‘Holy communion’ (4x); also ‘distribution’ (1x) and ‘contribution’ of alms (1x). In Liddell-Scott, it is defined as ‘communion, association, partnership’ (e.g. Thessalonians 3:10; Plato, *Georgias* 507e, *Laws* 861e, *Symposium* 182c and 188c, and *Republic* 343d); and also ‘joint-ownership’ (*PLond.* 2.311.2). However, Fitzmeyer (1976:241) reminds us that, in Acts, “the precise meaning of *koinōnia* is a matter of debate [...] what the word immediately indicates is the corporate character of the Christian group, as it expressed itself in various ways” (1976:254 n. 9, emphasis added).
- 8 The Roman and Jewish equivalents of the Greek-Hellenist *koinōnia* are the *societas* and *heteriska*. For an explanation of *koinōniai* and *koinōnos*, see Chapter 10.8, *Depositors and lenders versus ‘participants’*.

The pertinent semantic range of *κοινωνία* can be divided between the general reference to ‘sharing in something’ (Heb 13.16; Phil 2.1; 3.10; 1 Cor 10.16; Wis 8.18; 3 Macc 4.6) and the derivative meaning of ‘fellowship’, ‘partnership’ or ‘association’, which in the New Testament typically refers to fellowship with Christ or other Christians (TDNT 3:804–807). In the former capacity, the object shared is often money.

Interestingly, the argument against having “all things in common” is not new, and can be found, for example, in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica II Part 2*, written between 1265 and 1274 CE.⁹ Essentially, Aquinas contends that common ownership impedes positive economic outcomes, since “each one would shirk the labour and leave to another that which concerns the community”. Conversely, he argues that private ownership would (a) create less confusion, “because human affairs are conducted in more orderly fashion if each man is charged with taking care of some particular thing himself”; and (b) result in more peace, since “it is to be observed that quarrels arise more frequently where there is no division of the things possessed”. Also, from the seventeenth century, we find a similar argument (against common ownership) in the account of the plight of the Pilgrim Fathers who founded the second British Colony in North America in 1620. In his *History of Plymouth Plantation*, William Bradford, five-time governor of the colony, reports that the Pilgrims had made an agreement with their English sponsors that “all profits” (i.e. all crops, fish and trade goods) would “remain still in the common stock” from which all colonists were to take their food and goods.¹⁰

According to Bradford, sharing everything in common was not successful, and this misguided experiment resulted in the colonists almost starving. As a consequence, the Pilgrim Fathers decided to make a change in their economic practice. Each family was assigned a parcel of land and could keep whatever they could grow on it, as Bradford writes:

At length, after much debate of things, the Gov^r (with the advise of the cheefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corne every man for his owne perticuler, and in that regard trust to them selves; in all other things to goe on in the generall way as before. And so assigned to every

9 See Aquinas’ reply to Question 66, article 2: *Whether it is lawful for a man to possess a thing as his own?*

10 Bradford expands this statement to say that “all such persons as are of this collonie are to have their meate, drink, apparell, and all provisions out of the common stock and goods of the said collonie”.

family a parcell of land, according to the proportion of their number for that end [...] This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corne was planted then other wise would have bene by any means the Gov^t or any other could use, and saved him a great deall of trouble, and gave far better contente.

Apparently, to celebrate the abundant harvest that resulted from the change in economic practice, the Pilgrims set apart a day of thanksgiving.

More recently, Easterly (2006:93–94) recounts a comparable experience amongst rice-growers in Communist China in the late 1970s. He cites a report from Groves et al (1994:183–209) to explain that “the commune system that the Communists had in place all over China was leading to a breakdown in food production. Under this system, everybody was collectively responsible for tilling the land, and everybody had a share in the land’s output”. In 1978, the villagers of Xiaogang, in Anhui province, secretly rebelled against this communal system and divided the land amongst themselves, agreeing that each family would farm their own plot individually, and also keep the results of their own harvest. According to Easterly, “Rice production in Xiaogang shot up. The results were too spectacular to stay secret for long. Neighboring villages wanted to know how Xiaogang had increased its rice production so much. Other villages also put into place individual farming”. The growth and success of this rebellion eventually came to the notice of the authorities in Beijing who reacted positively: by 1982, individual farming was approved by the Central Communist Party and, by 1984, there were no agricultural communes operating in China.¹¹

When the apostle Peter was condemning the actions of Ananias and Sapphira, he posed the rhetorical question (Acts 5:4): “As long as [the land] remained unsold, was it not still your own? And [even] after it was sold, was not [the money] at your disposal and under your control”? Here, the word ‘control’ is rendered from the Greek ἐξουσία (*exousia*), which means ‘personal authority,

11 With regard to Soviet-style communism, Miller (2007:66) writes that, after the Berlin Wall came down, “communism and Marxism were generally seen to have been flawed experiments: inefficient economically, fraught with corruption, harmful environmentally, stifling to human creativity, abusive of individual human rights, and void of spiritual guidance and moral authority”. Also, Ball (2004:278) explains that “a rigidly controlled economy (like that of the former Soviet Union) works against the interests of both general welfare and efficiency”, because socialist economies that severely restrict trade “are apt to collapse into a state in which a large proportion of the wealth ends up in the hands of one person. In other words, they are more prone to corruption”.

control and/or privilege'. Thus, Peter's question would only be relevant if the kind of economic activity described in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 was indeed voluntary, which suggests that it may not have been community-wide. For example, Weiser (1981:138) claims that Barnabas' sale of his field, in order to present the funds to the church, was "an exception and not simply the usual behaviour of everyone". Furthermore, in his commentary on the episode involving Ananias and Sapphira, Barrett (1994:267) argues that Luke "never suggests, or hints, that church members ought at all times to dispose of their capital assets, and it is clear from the rest of [Acts] that they did not do so". He also asserts (1994:252) that "It is impossible to evade the conclusion that (at least as far as this verse is concerned) the sale of property and distribution of the proceeds was voluntary". Johnson and Harrington (1992:88) agree, and Lüdemann (1989:63–64) writes that "In content [Acts 5:4] rejects the idea of any obligation to renounce possessions and stresses the voluntary nature of the sale of property and the handing over of the proceeds".

Consequently, the voluntary nature of the activity, plus the Jewish edict/teaching proscribing the disbursement of more than 20 per cent of one's means on pious or charitable activity, which Jeremias states was a recognised precept in the first century CE, suggests that Acts 2:44 and 4:32 do not refer to any form of communism or communalism as we might understand it. However, in the end, the activity itself is far less important than its outcome. If having "all things in common" was a reference to an early form of communism (which is extremely doubtful) or even idealised communalism then, just like similar socio-economic experiments that followed throughout history, it obviously did not work. On the other hand, even if it referred to a form of community-centric capitalism, then, because it was both financed and facilitated via a banking operation managed originally by the apostles, whose "calling" ensured that the economic activity involved was not a major priority, this too apparently did not work, at least not as efficiently as it should, and was soon replaced by something that did: i.e. the new (or at least greatly improved) *trapeza*, controlled by the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*.

8.2 Illiterate Hebrews and Learned Hellenists

Now when [the Sanhedrin] saw the boldness and unfettered eloquence of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and untrained in the schools.

Acts 4:13

According to this verse, Peter and John (and, by implication, the other Hebrew apostles) were considered by the Sanhedrin to be “unlearned and ignorant” (κῆν).¹² The Greek is ἀγράμματος (*agrammatos*, ‘illiterate, without learning’), and ἰδιώτης (*idiōtēs*, an ‘unlearned, illiterate man, as opposed to learned and educated’). Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:44) inform us that “ἀγράμματος is very common in papyri after the Ptolemaic period and elsewhere of persons who cannot write”. They also use the word ‘illiterate’, which Marshall (1980:101) agrees is a possible meaning here.

On this basis, I suggest that the Sadducee elite would not (at this stage, at least) have regarded the Hebrew apostles as a serious political and/or economic threat to their vested interests in Jerusalem, especially since these *Hebraioi* assumedly did not speak Greek,¹³ which MacCulloch (2010:43) contends “was the *lingua franca* of the Middle East in the time of Jesus”; and Edersheim (1904:14) confirms was necessary for interaction with the Roman authorities and the numerous civil and military officials. However, the Hellenist Jesus-Believers, which included the seven *trapezitai*, would have been another matter, since Collins (1983:4) claims that “It is evident from the literature of the Diaspora that Jews were educated, by whatever means, in Greek literature and philosophy”. For instance, Barrett (1994:428) describes the Greek attributed to Phillip in his conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch (in Acts 8:26–38) as “stylish”. This implies that the Sadducee elite may have considered the threat posed by the Hellenist *trapezitai* and their fellow merchants and financiers to be quite serious. After all, apart from their level of education and literacy in Greek, we may infer from Acts 2:8–11 that they also had significant commercial and political contacts in Rome, Susa, Alexandria and other major cities.

8.3 No Needy Person among Them

Nor was there a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses proceeded to sell them, and one by one they brought the amount received from the sales. And laid it at the feet of the apostles, Then distribution was made according as anyone had need.

Acts 4:34–35

12 According to Conzelmann (1987:33), the apostles are also described as uneducated by Justin (*Apology* 1.39.3), Origen (*Contra Celsus* 1.62) and Pseudo-Clement (*Recognition* 1.62). The AMPC describes them as “common men with no educational advantages”.

13 In his commentary on Acts 2:7, Barrett (1994:120) writes that the degree of education to be expected in Galileans was such that they “would be unlikely to speak foreign languages”. For support, he cites the popular opinions of Galileans provided by Vermes (1973:42–57).

Cassidy (1987:24) expresses surprise that *πτωχός* (*ptōchos*, ‘poor’)¹⁴ does not appear anywhere within the text of Acts. In fact, Fitzmeyer (1976:245) describes the absence of *ptōchos* in Acts as “striking”. Instead, in Acts 4:34, Luke uses *ἐνδεής* (*endeēs*, ‘in want’ or ‘in need’; from *endēō*, ‘to lack’), which is generally understood to refer to material wants and needs.

According to Liddell-Scott, *endeēs* is rendered: (a) *generally*, ‘wanting or lacking in, in need of a thing’; (b) in the *absolute sense*, ‘in need, indigent’; and (c) in the *comparative sense*, ‘deficient, wanting, unequal’. Interestingly, Barrett (1994:252) writes that *endeēs* occurs nowhere else in the NT; and, without any close point of comparison, there is difficulty in determining the proper context in this verse. Consequently, we cannot be totally confident that Luke intended the word to be used – as traditionally assumed – in its *absolute sense*: i.e. ‘in need, indigent’. Therefore, by rendering *endeēs* as ‘poor’ in Acts 4:34, it is possible that the CJB has moved beyond what might actually be indicated in the text; likewise, the TLB for its use of ‘poverty’; the AMPC and KNOX even more so by using ‘destitute’.

Liddell-Scott explains that *endeēs* is used frequently in the *comparative sense*: namely, in accounts of elite behaviour, public life, military campaigns, etc. For example, Herodotus (*Histories*, 1.32) uses *endeēs* to discuss the idea that neither nations nor individuals are self-sufficient; both ‘lack’ something, which is why, according to Plato (*Republic*, 369b), the *polis*, ‘city’, came into being – as people came together to fulfil particular ‘needs’ (*endeēs*). Also, Antiphon (*Herodes*, 5.77) refers to the wealthy father of Helos as someone who, in his public duties and responsibilities (e.g. paying for ‘choruses’, ‘imposts’ and ‘tribute’), was not found ‘lacking’ (*endeēs*); and Xenophon (*Hellenica*, 6.1.3) reports that Polydamas, a wealthy elite, used his own money to make up any ‘deficit’ (*endeēseie*) in the public accounts of the city of Pharsalus. Furthermore, both Plato (*Laws*, 697e) and Herodotus (*Histories*, 7.48) use *endeēs* in their discussions of whether the Greek military forces were deficient: i.e. ‘short of’ men. Similarly, Thucydides (*Peloponnesian Wars*, 1.10.3) uses *endeēstéra* in his comment that the Trojan expedition was ‘comparatively small’ (‘cometh short’, according to Thomas Hobbes, 1843). In addition, Isocrates (*Panegyricus*, 4.105) uses *endeēstérous* (rendered ‘poorer in fortune’) to describe people who deserved to hold public office but were not rich enough to qualify.

Unfortunately, biblical scholars have almost universally tended to assume that references to material needs in the NT apply exclusively to the poor; whereas, as we can see from the above literary references, businesses and/or estates, cities, armies and even nations frequently need/lack certain

14 Thayer’s Lexicon states that a *ptōchos* obtains his living solely by begging.

commodities, services or even personnel that are integral to their normal commercial or administrative operations. What's more, in order to procure whatever they lack, these groups or entities often need some form of loan or investment; and that particular need is usually met by a bank. Consequently, if we accept the banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, I would suggest that Luke's use of *endeēs* in Acts 4:34 may imply various levels of commercial need – which is eminently plausible since we note that, in Acts 4:35, the Greek word translated as 'need' is *χρεία* (*chreia*), which in Acts 6:3 is rendered as 'business', and which Vine defines as "the distribution of funds", thus implying a commercial rather than charitable context.

Another potential snare for biblical scholars, in determining the original meaning behind Luke's use of *endeēs*, lies in the fact that the singular English word "poor" does not correspond precisely to the binary economic classification found in Greco-Roman literature, as Countryman (1980:25) explains in the following instructive insight:

The poor, by contrast [with rich landowners], were those who lived by their own labor. Here we must distinguish between two groups of people for whom the Greeks and Romans had distinct terms, but whom we commonly lump together in English as 'the poor'. At the bottom of the economic scale stood those whom the ancients called *ptōchoi* or *indigentes*; we shall refer to them here as 'the indigent', that is, people utterly without resources. They owned nothing by way of property or tools of trade, and they lived a hand-to-mouth existence, dependent on day-labor or begging. At a higher level stood the *penētai* or *pauperes*. Unfortunately, we have no distinct word for them in English – only the catch-all term 'poor'. They were small shopkeepers, artisans and farmers, people who owned property and the tools of their trade and could expect a reliable income from their own labor. Even if a man owned a considerable staff of slaves and a prosperous shop, he was [described as] 'poor' as long as he engaged actively and directly in the business.¹⁵

Finley (1973:41) also highlights the difference between *ptōchoi* and *penētai*.¹⁶ Therefore, since the majority of the primitive church congregation could be

15 See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s. vv. *πένης* and *πενυχός* by Friederick Hauck; *πτωχός*, *πτωχεία* and *πτωεύ* by Friederick Hauck and Ernst Bammel; cited in Countryman, 1980:25, n. 57.

16 He also confirms that a "*plousios* [meaning 'wealthy, opulent', from *ploutos*, 'wealth'] was a man who was rich enough to live properly on his income": i.e. without the need to work. Also, Stegemann and Stegemann (1999:71) argue that the line between the upper echelons

categorised as *penētai*,¹⁷ we should be far more scrupulous when examining that community's activities involving any of the so-called "poor". Furthermore, we are told that Luke used the LXX as his main source of the OT scriptures, which may help shed further light on his use of *endeēs* rather than *ptōchos*.

When Lüdemann (1981:61) asserts that Luke's real purpose in Acts is to show that Old Testament "ideals" were being realised in the primitive church community, one of the ideal situations he is no doubt alluding to (regarding the poor) can be found in the 15th chapter of Deuteronomy; specifically verses 4, 7 and 8, as below. This chapter forms part of the covenantal promises and edicts attributed to Yahweh, supposedly given prior to the Children of Israel's entry and possession of the Promised Land of Canaan.

But there will be no poor (LXX: *endeēs*) among you, for the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess.

If there is among you a poor (LXX: *endeēs*) man, one of your kinsmen in any of the towns of your land which the Lord which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your [mind and] heart, or close your hand to your poor brother (LXX: *epidéomenou*).

But you shall open your hand wide to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need (LXX: *endeēitai*), which he lacks (LXX: *endeēitai*).

On the other hand, in LXX Proverbs 19:17, it states that "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and that which he has given He will repay to him"; and here, the Greek word used for 'poor' is *ptōchon*.

What strikes us in particular concerning the above verses is that the solution to the problems experienced by the 'needy' (*endeēs*) mentioned in Deuteronomy 15:7 is to *lend* them what they need (15:8); whereas, the solution to the problems experienced by the *ptōchoi* (i.e. the destitute or truly 'poor') in Proverbs 19:17, is to *give* them whatever they lack. From this we may infer that, if the *endeēs* and *ptōchoi* are to be treated differently, they may therefore represent different economic categories of people. Thus, it would appear that, in the LXX, *ptōchos* and *endeēs* are clearly differentiated; and I would therefore suggest that Luke's use of the LXX as his main OT source material may have inspired him to deliberately choose *endeēs* in Acts 4:34 for a specific purpose: i.e. to denote a group of people who might not have included

of the *penētai* and *plousioi* is frequently blurred, which can make it difficult to separate these two groups.

17 See Chapter 2.2, *The initial tranche of converts*.

ptōchoi – thus implying that he was not necessarily alluding to acts of charity as the primary if not sole means of meeting their needs. If true, and if we take into account more than three millennia of religious and economic historical precedents, it is possible that Acts 4:34–35 depicts members of the primitive church congregation providing the funding that allowed the apostles – in their capacity as leaders of a new religious sect – to perform a role traditionally associated with the banking or treasury operations of religious communities and ancient temples.¹⁸ Consequently, since all this activity took place in the area of the Jerusalem Temple known as Solomon's porch, it is somewhat ironic that Jesus' own cadre of *trapezitai* and *kapēloi* were now operating inside the temple precincts.

Then again, if “divine” (or divinely-inspired) material blessing did indeed occur in the post-Pentecost period, it is possible that the primitive church economy flourished to the point where the needs of any *ptōchoi* or *indigentes* could have been taken care of within the community's day-to-day commercial activities: e.g. through remunerated employment by the more affluent members of the nascent sect. This possible scenario is implicit in an exhortation from the Pseudo-Clementines: “Give the unskilled an opportunity to earn their daily bread; give work to those who can do it”.¹⁹ Also, this preferential employment practice amongst co-religionists was evident in the seventeenth century and beyond in the conventions of the Court Jews of Europe; as Gross (1974:64) explains: “The economic significance for the Jewish community of this group of wholesale merchants, bankers and industrial entrepreneurs consisted not only in their role in the accumulation of capital, *but also and primarily in their collective role in creating employment opportunities for other Jews*” (emphasis added). Therefore, in 33–37 CE, similar employment practices within the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers in Jerusalem could easily have met the needs of any ‘poor and needy’ amongst the congregation – rather than what we have been led to believe: i.e. that it was achieved primarily through extraordinary acts of charity.²⁰

18 This is supported by Sterba's comment (1976:19) mentioned previously that “the Mesopotamian temple corporation combined many functions of a modern day public treasury, commercial bank, accounting firm and welfare agency”.

19 *The Epistle of Clement* 8, 6: GCS 42, 12; cited in Hengel, 1974:43. That said, the Pseudo-Clementines also urged their readers to extend charity where appropriate; and so their instruction concludes with “take care to look after those who are unable to work”.

20 Likewise, Viner (1978:23) argues that the Church Fathers have generally failed to recognise “the possibility that income or property in excess of current need might help the poor if used productively to provide them with cheap necessities or *with remunerative employment* than if distributed as alms” (emphasis added).

8.4 Commercial Repercussions of the Ananias and Sapphira Episode

And the whole church and all others who heard of [the deception and deaths of Ananias and Sapphira] were appalled [great awe and strange terror and dread seized them].

Acts 5:11

Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:50), Marshall (1980:111), Johnson and Harrington (1992:88), and also Lüdemann (1989:66) all note that, in Acts 5:2, the severity of Ananias' "sin" is depicted in the use of the word ἐνσφίσατο (*enosphisato*, 'withheld' or 'kept back'; from *nosphizō*, 'to purloin, embezzle'),²¹ which Johnson and Harrington (1992:88) state is "at home in the context of financial fraud".²² However, of greater importance here, especially in the minds of a first-century Jewish readership, is the allusion to the story of Achan in Joshua 7:1–26 who, after the conquest of Jericho, kept something back (*enosphisato* in LXX Joshua 7:1) from the goods and possessions placed under the "ban" (Hebrew: חֶרֶם, *hērem*, 'cursed thing') – and thus dedicated to the Lord. In this ancient pericope, Achan's death was ordered by Yahweh; and Barrett (1994:268) asserts that, in first-century Jerusalem, the dread that fell upon the populace, after the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, was "the fear of the supernatural".

As mentioned earlier, temples were used as banks because the people believed that they were safe depositories for their assets; in part because of the long-standing, mythological relationship between the gods and money. Therefore, if we accept the existence of a temple-banking operation within the primitive church, then physical evidence of divine retribution for anyone who attempted to deceive the presiding deity²³ would have convinced the astonished populace of Jerusalem that the nascent sect's banking venture had "the hand of God" upon it. Consequently, such a powerful (i.e. divine) "testimonial" would be guaranteed to attract a great deal of new business for that particular temple-banking operation; and thus substantially increase the workload pressure on the apostles – which would have exposed their competency or workload problem, as highlighted soon after in Acts 6:1.

21 As used in Titus 2:10.

22 They cite 11 Maccabees 4:32. See also Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.29 §274.

23 As suggested by Peter's accusations: "You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:4); and also "How could you two have agreed and conspired together to try to deceive the Spirit of the Lord?" (5:9).

8.5 The Significance of Meeting in Solomon's Porch

And by common consent they all met together [at the temple] in the covered porch called Solomon's.

Acts 5:12

Without seeming to appreciate the wider implications, Esler (1987:149) alludes to the potential significance of the detail in the above verse.

The stoa on the eastern side [of the Temple] bore the name 'Solomon's Portico'²⁴ and appears to have functioned as a meeting-place for the early Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 3:11, 5:12). Under and in front of these porticoes took place the bustling activities of the Temple mount. Here merchants sold animals for sacrifice and money-lenders conducted their trade, especially the exchange of Greek and Roman coinage for the half-shekels with which the Jews paid the annual Temple tax.

In other words, the regular meeting place of the large and rapidly growing community of Jesus-Believers was adjacent to the area where the Temple traders (*kapēloi*) and money-changers (*kollybistai*) conducted their daily business. Consequently, these traders and money-changers would have witnessed first-hand the numerical and economic growth of this new sect; and no doubt reported everything they saw and heard to their masters within the Sadducee elite.

However, Solomon's porch was not the only venue where members of the primitive church met together on a regular basis. According to Acts 2:46, "day after day [the members of the new sect] regularly assembled in the temple with united purpose, and in their homes they broke bread". In this verse, the phrase "with united purpose" is ὁμοθυμαδόν (*homothymadon*), which is also used in Acts 5:12 for "with common consent" (AMPC), "by one accord" (NASB and KJV), or "united in mind and purpose" (CJB). It is an unusual Greek compound (*homou*, 'together'; *thymos*, 'passion') used in various parts of Acts to depict the extraordinary depth of unity exhibited by the primitive church congregation.²⁵ This, plus circumstantial evidence examined elsewhere, gives rise to speculation that members of the primitive church may have formed

24 Esler is citing Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.220–222.

25 For example, see Acts 1:14 and 2:1 (in the upper room); 4:24 (after Peter and John were released by the chief priests and elders); and also 15:25 (in the letter written by the church elders to the brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia).

themselves into more than just a closely-knit religious community. Regular fellowship in Solomon's Portico, as well as "breaking bread" in each other's homes, would have greatly strengthened relationship bonds within the community, thus creating a significant level of trust – on both the personal *and* business front. In fact, according to Hays (2010:193), "the expression μετελάμβανον τροψῆς (in Luke 2:46) demonstrates the consumption of a proper meal, not merely a symbolic rite".²⁶ And since business was (and still is in the Middle East) often conducted over a meal, this implies that "breaking bread" may not have been a reference to the Eucharist, but was instead a description of circumstances in which business was discussed – especially given the involvement of so many merchants from the Jewish Diaspora.

The possibility of sect members trading with each other on a regular basis represents an important factor that, if true, would have contributed greatly to the economic growth experienced by the community. This dynamic also has significant ramifications for the global church today, which is perhaps best explained by citing the problems that occur when this form of what has been occasionally mislabelled "cooperative economics" is absent.²⁷ For example, toward the end of the twentieth century, African-American leaders in the United States lamented the virtual non-existence of economic cooperation and/or patronage within their communities: i.e. Black people do *not* make a habit of buying Black-produced goods and services from Black-owned businesses. As a result, the so-called "Black dollar" is believed to circulate only once (or for less than one day) within the Black population before it leaves – by being spent outside the community. In his 1997 presidential address to the Progressive National Baptist Convention, in which he discussed community development, Thomas Kilgore commented:

We live in communities. We must try to live in community. They must spread beyond our church doors. We must develop a love affair with Black businessmen, politicians, fraternal groups, community centers and poor and disinherited people. Our financial resources must be pooled and wisely used. We can no longer afford to permit the Black dollar to circulate only one and a half times in the Black community. It leaves us

²⁶ He cites Lindemann (1998:208).

²⁷ The term "cooperative economics" dates to a treatise by Robert Owen, "A New View of Society", published in 1814 (See *Report to the County of Lanark/A New Society*, Ringwood: Penguin Publishers, 1970). It was originally used in a socialist context, but that is not how the modern African-American leaders and writers mentioned here intended it to be understood. Therefore, perhaps a more appropriate description would be "community-centric capitalism".

before it does much good. This brief circulation accounts for our spending 92.5 per cent of our 90 billion dollar income outside the Black community. What a tragedy.²⁸

In the same speech, Kilgore claimed that the Chinese dollar circulated five times and the Jewish dollar seven times before they were spent outside their respective ethnic communities. Likewise, the University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth reported that "Money circulates zero to one time within the black community, compared to the more than six times it circulates in the Latino community, nine times in the Asian community and unlimited amount of times within the white community".²⁹ And commenting on the same issue, Stephens (1996:18) cites a study conducted by Washington-based economic development specialist, John Wray, tracing the flow of dollars through different ethnic communities.

Wray found that in the Asian community, a dollar circulates among the community's banks, brokers, shopkeepers and business professionals for up to 28 days before it is spent with outsiders. In the Jewish community, the circulation period was 19 days; in the WASP community, 17 days; but in the African-American community – 6 hours!

It would be difficult to prove; however, the differences in dollar circulation periods for different ethnic communities may contribute in some way to their respective differences in incomes because, as Easterly (2002:162–163) notes, in the United States, Blacks earn 41 per cent less than Whites, while Asians earn 16 per cent more.³⁰ Hence, according to one website/blog, the failure by African-Americans to create and support an economic system that keeps and circulates their dollars within their own community is the primary reason why this particular community experiences less prosperity than other ethnic groups.³¹ Therefore, I would argue that, if the primitive church did engage in a form of community-centric capitalism – motivated by *homothymadon*; an extraordinary depth of unity that engenders significant levels of trust – this would have been a critical factor in the community's remarkable

28 Cited in Avant (2004:58).

29 See online at <http://www.blackeconomicdevelopment.com/black-buying-power-increases-but-circulation-of-dollar-within-community-remains-low/>; accessed on April 16th 2013.

30 Easterly (2002:163, n. 21) is citing *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995*, tables 52 and 724.

31 See <http://uvbc.blogspot.com/2006/06/state-of-africa-america-v-cooperative.html>; accessed on December 3rd 2008.

economic growth. This speculation is supported by a comment from Brooks (2011:155–156), who claims that “Trust creates wealth” because, amongst other things, “Trust removes friction and lowers transaction costs”.³² Likewise, Zak and Knack (2001:295–321) note that “high trust societies” have higher rates of investment and growth.³³

8.6 A Large Number of the Priests Were Obedient to the Faith

[The Seven were] presented to the apostles, who after prayer laid their hands on them. And the message of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem; and [besides] a large number of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:6–7

If we give credence to Luke’s numbers, in less than three and a half years, the primitive church community had grown from “120” (Acts 1:15)³⁴ to over “3,000 souls” (2:41), and then to “5,000” (4:4), to which “more and more there were [...] added to the Lord” (5:14), which eventually became large enough to be considered a “multitude” (6:2).

Now, as implied above, the size of the multitude that was already much larger than 5,000 had increased even further, and substantially so (i.e. “multiplied greatly”) – which occurred very soon after the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* assumed day-to-day control of the *trapeza*. However, the growing threat to the Sadducee elite’s powerbase was not based on numbers alone, because Luke reports here that a large number of priests defected to the new sect; an action that assumes greater significance when we realise that “many, though not

32 Interestingly, as part of a research project conducted in 1993 to examine small business financing problems in the UK, I interviewed a senior executive from Rabobank in Holland. At one point, my interviewee stated that, in 1990, Rabobank lent money to small local business owners at the same interest rate that they charged the Dutch government; and when asked how the bank was able to do this, his answer was one word: trust. Rabobank is set up as a federation of local credit unions, and is therefore embedded in the local communities they serve. In fact, there are numerous instances where bank executives are related by blood and/or marriage to their customers; hence the level of trust is much greater than in normal banking relationships.

33 In a similar vein, Brooks (2011:156) also writes that “People in more trusting cultures have wider stock market-participation rates”.

34 Or “500”, if we take Paul’s figure in 1 Corinthians 15:6 describing the number of people to whom Christ revealed Himself during the 40-day period between Calvary and His ascension.

all, Priests were Sadducees" (Barrett, 1994:317). Marshall (1980:127–128) also informs us that "The priests were presumably those attached to the temple in Jerusalem, of whom there were a great number (estimated at 18,000 priests and Levites)". Therefore, we are left to ponder how Luke's "large number of the priests" might translate into numerical terms, if viewed as a percentage of 18,000. Obviously, it was large enough to cause serious concern amongst the Sadducee elite.

However, this defection may have had serious economic ramifications as well because, according to Jeremias (1969:104), the priests who lived in Jerusalem all year round seemed to enjoy a life of education and some degree of wealth;³⁵ also (1969:31), many of the lower orders of priests engaged in commerce. Therefore, I would suggest that, at this point, in the minds of the Sadducee leadership, the growing economic and political threat could no longer be ignored – or tolerated. Consequently, it comes as no surprise to find that the very next passage in Luke's text describes the events leading up to the premeditated murder/execution of Stephen, leader of the Hellenist *trapezitai*.

35 In fact, we are reminded that Josephus came from a well-to-do priestly family. He claims (*Vita* 1–6) that "I am not only sprung from a sacerdotal family in general, but from the first of the twenty-four courses; and [...] I am of the chief family of that first course also".

Preliminary Conclusions

For the Sadducees who controlled the Temple cult and also the Temple treasury-bank, politics and money had become more important than religion;¹ and a disbelief in life after death motivated their efforts to acquire and maintain as much power and wealth as possible during their earthly lifetime.² However, as the Lukan text shows, over a relatively short period of time, these priestly and lay aristocrats saw what remained of their earthly power and privilege seriously threatened by the dramatic growth of a new sect, accompanied by the rapidly expanding activities of a rival banking facility that was managed by the sect's leadership, and also operating within the very Temple precincts they thought they controlled.

The Sadducees could not possibly ignore the large numbers of converts that this new sect was attracting on a regular basis. Neither could they ignore the commercial attraction (to residents, pilgrims and perhaps even foreign merchants) of a banking operation that was believed to have “the hand of God upon it”, and was also supervised by followers of Christ and thus men of great integrity – especially when their own financial operations were tainted by a history of greed and corruption. The threat posed by this new sect was undeniably real, and was literally staring them in the face. It was also growing at an alarming rate and, therefore, had to be dealt with swiftly and decisively. In this situation, doctrinal issues were of secondary importance; however, they provided a convenient excuse to permit naked power to supplant discussion, to use Esler's words (1987:22). Consequently, in the religious, political and economic environment of Jerusalem of that period, the success that commenced with Pentecost had only one possible outcome: the persecution recorded in Acts 7 and 8. And if we accept the full implications of having a *trapeza* operating at the heart of the primitive church, controlled by seven, well-connected Hellenist *trapezitai*, this scenario is supported in a credible way by both the detail and sequence of events depicted in Luke's text.

Furthermore, I submit that the above investigation of the text in Acts 2 to 8 has achieved its secondary aim of demonstrating the potential value of using an economic perspective as part of a suite of forensic exegetical tools. Obviously, there have always been political implications, as Esler (1987:21) calls them, in

¹ See Schürer et al (1979:412).

² See Goldin (1955:39).

the Acts narrative. However, if we adopt the alternative, banking-related interpretation of *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2, the primary reason for the persecution instigated by the Sadducee elite (and their agents) becomes clearer, if not obvious. In addition, adoption of this alternative interpretation opens a door to possible solutions to numerous other exegetical problems or conundrums that have puzzled biblical scholars for some time.

The Primitive Church ‘Trapeza’

10.1 Constructing a Theoretical Model

In order to appreciate the full extent of the socio-economic impact of a *trapeza* operating within the primitive church community, we need to create some kind of theoretical model-cum-guide as to the possible scope of its activities. The model offered here is based on the available literature dealing with the activities of ancient temple-based banks and Greco-Roman banking operations; as well as our knowledge of private, Hellenistic-style *trapezai* which, unlike the older palace- or temple-based forms, did not owe their success to a link with elite-dominated institutions, but more specifically to the competence and business connections of the individuals who controlled them.

You will notice that I often resort to the term “banking facility” or “banking operation”. My reasons for doing so are because, in the mind of the modern reader, the word “bank” on its own conjures up stereotypical notions that may or may not match the reality of what was taking place in the area known as Solomon’s porch during the three to three and a half years following the original Day of Pentecost. Cohen (1997) shares this concern for possible misconceptions regarding the workings of ancient *trapezai*, and so chooses to refer to them as “trapezitic businesses” rather than banks. He acknowledges (1997:8) the long standing and widely-accepted definition of a bank: namely, “a business having an obligation to repay funds (‘deposits’) received from a multitude of sources, but with the interim right to make loans and investments for its own account”. However, this obviously applies to the specific category of a commercial (i.e. deposit and loan) bank, and is therefore far too narrow for the purposes of this study, because a “trapezitic business” can be much more than this,¹ depending, firstly, on the micro-economic environment in which it is operating; and, secondly, the skill and connections of the *trapezitai* involved, since these will often determine the kind of financing (and other business) opportunities available for profitable exploitation.²

1 As mentioned previously, Cohen (1997:7) contends that ancient *trapezitai* (bankers) not only “provided loans [and] accepted deposits”, they also “served as intermediaries in facilitating commerce”.

2 For example, according to Davies (2005), not only was Pasiōn the most famous banker in fourth-century Athens, he also “owned the largest shield factory in Greece and conducted

According to Cohen (1997:62), the *trapezai* of ancient Greece were not institutions as we would understand them, but rather commercial enterprises (*ergasia*) that allowed the *trapezitai* to practice their *technē*, which he defines as “a craft or trade requiring personal commitment, knowledge and skill”. He states (1997:63) that “Athens did not accord juridical status to commercial entities”, which means that the Athenian legal system did not recognise “trapezitic businesses” as institutions and/or legal entities in their own right, but as “intensely personalized operations (*ergasia*) conducted by individuals having considerable skills in finance”. He also comments (1997:9) that they were “almost entirely free of governmental regulation”, and goes on to make another important observation:

For modern, economic historians, this Athenian characterization has resulted in dual confusion: the assumption that since the form of organization was simple, the business conducted must have been insignificant or simplistic; and the equally enticing but incorrect conclusion that because of the complexity of the business undertaken, Athenian banks must have required an operational organization similar to that of modern enterprises. In reality, the Athenian *trapeza* was a relatively simple organization with a complex business function.

This, plus his conclusion (1997:224) that the Greek *trapezitai* transformed not just the economy, but also Athenian society, implies that, in first-century Jerusalem, there was a lot more taking place than just men sitting at small tables exchanging foreign coins. But, unfortunately, Jerome’s inept Latin translations of banking-related NT words have not done justice to the important role of *trapezitai* at that time.

For example, most ET bibles translate *trapezitais* in Matthew 25:27 as ‘with the bankers’. However, based on Jerome’s translation of *trapezitais* as the Latin word *nummulariis*, the KJV, GNV and WYC, for example, render it ‘with the exchangers’ (DARBY uses ‘money-changers’), which describes a specific, specialised, but decidedly low-level category of banking activity. As a consequence, for many centuries, the general consensus amongst theologians and church historians has been that ancient *trapezitai* performed a somewhat pedestrian and far less complex role than we now understand to be the case. What’s more, in Matthew 25:27, the stated purpose of leaving the master’s talent ‘with the bankers’ was to earn ‘interest’ (*tokos*), which does not occur in

a hiring business lending domestic articles such as clothes, blankets, silver bowls, etc. for a lucrative fee”.

money-changing (i.e. foreign exchange) transactions. Therefore, it would have been more accurate (and helpful) if Jerome had used *faenerator*, which denotes a 'specialist money-lender', and was usually applied to individuals operating at the upper if not elite stratum of banking.

10.2 Banking in the Roman Empire

According to Homer (1963:44), the Romans were "a nation of farmers and soldiers. They left manufacture, commerce and banking mainly to foreigners".

This is a gross oversimplification of what was a complex and geographically widespread range of economic activities,³ conducted by individuals from three distinct, socio-economic strata. Firstly, wealthy and all-powerful patricians or elites, who were mainly to be found in Italy, and whose primary economic motivation was the maintenance and augmentation of their patrimony and/or vast estates. Secondly, "entrepreneurs", who were willing to take major risks and also travel extensively in the pursuit of profit.⁴ And, finally, "artisans", who practiced the various trades, including that of professional banker, and whose activities were predominantly of a local nature. Interestingly, the majority of Homer's "foreigners" would have consisted of slaves and freedmen of the Roman elite who, as mentioned previously, conducted much of the day-to-day business of their masters' or ex-masters' financial operations.

From Livy (9.40.16), we learn that the earliest evidence of professional/artisan banking in Rome dates back to sometime between 318 and 310 BCE; but it is generally understood that the Greek-style *trapeza*, or "trapezitic" form of business, came to Italy during the period after the Second Punic War (post-210 BCE), when a number of Hellenistic practices were assimilated by both individuals and the state.⁵ As explained above, the Greek-style *trapeza* was "a relatively simple organization [or enterprise] with a complex business function", which allowed an individual banker the freedom and scope to perform a range of banking and financing functions. However, in Italy, banking evolved into an assortment of different and distinct niche businesses that operated within separate, specialised categories. Thus, in the Roman fiscal system, the Greek-Hellenistic occupation of *trapezitēs* – a singular, all-encompassing

3 Andreau (1999:57) writes that he was "struck by the complexity of Roman financial life".

4 It is Howgego (1992:14) who first referred to this category of financiers as "entrepreneurs".

5 According to Rathbone (2007:315), "Roman commercial practice owed much to Greek influence"; and Chachi (2005:7) asserts that "most of the earliest bankers in Rome had Greek names and were called *trapezitēs* as well".

categorisation that covered a wide range of financial functions – was broken down into its component parts to produce a menu of diverse, specialist banking occupations depicted by the different role-labels of *argentarius* (deposit banker), *coactor argentarius* (deposit banker and money-receiver), *nummularius* (money-changer and assayer), *faenerator* (specialist money-lender), *negotiator* (specialist money-lender operating in the provinces), *arcarius* (cashier) and *dispensator* (treasurer).

The main reason for this was the domination of the Roman elite in the provision of loans and other forms of financing – an obvious result of their vast wealth. Countryman (1980:23–24) writes that “Members of the upper [social] orders in Rome – senators and equestrians – were required to possess a certain minimum wealth, called the *census*”.⁶ For instance (1980:41, n. 53), “Equestrians were required to possess property worth 400,000 sesterces;⁷ senators 1,200,000 sesterces (sometimes the figure is given as 1,000,000).⁸ But for practical purposes, a senator could not manage on less than 8,000,000”.⁹ Nevertheless, even though we have evidence of *faeneratores* (specialist money-lenders) amongst the Roman elite, the financial operations of the vast majority of the ruling class were conducted primarily as part of the management of the overall income derived from their patrimony, alongside say rents or leases.¹⁰ However, according to Shatzman (1975:49, n. 6) and Gara (1988:943–946), the annual income derived from land in Italy was only around 6 per cent, whilst the standard

6 Hence, Ovid writes: *dat census honores*, ‘property brings honours’ (*Amores* III.viii.55; cited in Ste. Croix, 2001:425).

7 Finley (1973:46) explains that Roman society was originally organised as just two basic groupings (patricians and plebeians), and that the equestrian order was established by Augustus to embrace the growing number of elite who were not senators, but who owned property worth more than 400,000 sesterces.

8 These minimum amounts are confirmed by Esler (1987:71, given in *denarii*), Crossan (1999:180) and also Stegemann and Stegemann (1999:73), who explain that many equestrians and senators accumulated wealth far in excess of the minimum: e.g. the patrimony of Pliny the Younger was “about 20 million sesterces”; also, according to Tacitus (*Annals* 13.42), Seneca apparently amassed a fortune worth 300 million sesterces.

9 Countryman cites Richard Duncan-Jones (1974).

10 Andreau (1999:24) comments that, since “the elite started off with a collection of properties already in their possession, their economic strategies were founded upon the management of those possessions. Money was thus never regarded as capital, a value introduced into the economic process in order to create new wealth, but rather was seen either as a component of their patrimony, a substitute for land, houses, and slaves, or as an income provided by the patrimony”.

Roman interest rate for loans was 12 per cent per annum¹¹ – an obvious incentive for elites to become *faeneratores*, which offered them an opportunity to augment the income from their patrimony.

As a consequence, the day-to-day business of professional or artisan banking was opened up to numerous non-elites. However, since these lower social ranks could not compete with the economic and political power of the aristocratic *faeneratores*, it meant that the professional or artisan class of bankers were restricted to operating within whatever market niches were ignored by the elites, thus forcing them to specialise. For example, Andreau (1999:56) states that, unlike their Greek predecessors, professional/artisan bankers of the Roman era (*argentarii*) were not involved as principals in the most profitable form of lending: the so-called maritime or bottomry loans, which were financed by elite *faeneratores* or entrepreneurs.¹² Roman *argentarii* were apparently relegated to minor roles “as the creditors’ payment agents, as intermediaries, as witnesses of the agreement, or as receivers of contracts that were deposited with them for safekeeping”.¹³

In between the elite financiers and the professional/artisan bankers we find the “entrepreneurs”: wealthy businessmen who Andreau (1999:52) states “did not belong either to the landowning aristocracy or the world of professions, but who would nevertheless have occupied a substantial place”.¹⁴ In their search for profit, these entrepreneurs were willing to take risks (in a manner not unlike their modern counterparts), and used both their own funds, as well as the funds of others, in their high-level financing activities. According to Andreau (1999:15–16, 53), the primary role of a specific group of entrepreneurs, known as *negotiatores*, was to act as agents of the Roman elite and deploy the investment funds of their aristocratic clients in the provinces, where they advanced loans to private individuals, to cities, to vassal rulers and foreign sovereigns.

11 In a similar vein, Gross (1975:53) informs us that it was “the daily experience of most Jewish sages that money could, in fact, earn greater increments than did land or any other movable property”.

12 Meggitt (1998:48) confirms that, with regard to the Mediterranean sea trade, “the upper echelons of Roman Imperial society” were “both the source of its funding and its chief financial beneficiaries”; perhaps because, as Andreau (1999:56) explains, “To make bottomry (maritime) loans, you had to be acquainted with the circles of maritime commerce and you needed business contacts in other Mediterranean ports”.

13 For support, Andreau cites Bogaert (1968:372–374, 411–413 and 1994:217–218).

14 He states that, generally, entrepreneurs had not risen to the rank of either senator or equestrian; or else they were equestrians whose position in that order did not satisfy their aspirations. As a consequence, “In order to arrive [entrepreneurs] pinned their hopes on their economic activities and the acquisition of greater wealth. The circle of ‘entrepreneurs’ thus constituted a major phenomenon of mobility and social advancement”.

10.3 Trapeza or *Argentaria*?

Of particular relevance to this study is Cohen's statement that a Greek-style *trapeza* was "almost entirely free of governmental regulation"¹⁵ – because that was definitely not the case with a Roman *argentaria*.

Andreau (1999:10) informs us that one of the differences between the Roman elite financiers (*faeneratores*) and professional/artisan bankers (*argentarii*, *coactores argentarii* and *nummularii*) was the fact that the activities of the latter were regulated, including a rule that set limits on the interest rate. He asserts (1999:101–102) that even though the laws were enacted to govern the entire financial profession, they did not in fact apply to the elite financiers or entrepreneurs, but "solely to professional money-changers and bankers [who] constituted the only category of financiers that was subject to a specific set of regulations applied on a permanent basis".¹⁶ He also writes (1999:17, 46) that, for the most part, these regulations changed very little between the end of the Republic and the end of the Principate, and appear to have been applied effectually. Deposit and credit transactions had to be recorded in a client's account (Latin: *ratio*, also *ratio accepti et expensi*), and the law stipulated that a bank's register of accounts had to be produced in court whenever a client was involved in a law-suit – even if the case did not involve the banker personally – because, as Rathbone (2007:317) explains, a bank was often the only source of written records for particular transactions.

By contrast, as Andreau continues, in normal times, "the public authorities intervened very little in the affairs of private financiers". Consequently, if there was a banking facility operating within the primitive church community in the post-Pentecost period, I would argue that, both in terms of its description and function, it is unlikely to have been a Roman-style *argentaria*, with its regulatory burden and government oversight, simply because the Hellenist-Believers would have wanted to avoid any kind of scrutiny by the Sadducee elite, for reasons implicit in the tension between temple and sect, as described in Luke's text. Therefore, they were more likely to choose to function as a private and virtually unregulated, Hellenistic-style *trapeza*, which would have avoided any problems with the Roman authorities and/or their Jewish representatives in Jerusalem.

15 Cohen (1997:43) expands this: "Financial arrangements were subject to no control other than that of market conditions: 'commerce in Athens was never an affair of the state'. He cites Mossé (1983:53).

16 Interestingly, even though Roman women were allowed to manage their own patrimony (see Fraschetti, 1993:4, 52), according to Callistratus (*Digest* 2.13.12), the Roman banking regulations explicitly banned women from the profession of *argentarius*.

I appreciate that the finer points of corporate law and financial terminology might appear out of place in a discussion of the kind of unstructured and seemingly chaotic commercial activity to be found in the marketplace of first-century Jerusalem. Nevertheless, if any of the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* were wealthy businessmen (and also if they were operating at the heart of a network or consortium of wealthy merchants who regularly did business with each other), in all probability they would have been classified as entrepreneurs. This too, according to Andreau (1999:102), would have ensured that their financing activities were free from regulation and bureaucratic oversight, allowing them to operate unhindered by the strict Roman banking laws of the time – and also beyond the control of the Sanhedrin. In fact, it may not be too much to suggest that one of the reasons why some or all of these particular seven individuals were selected by the multitude to serve 'at the banking-tables' (or 'in the bank') was precisely because they qualified as entrepreneurs, according to Roman fiscal convention.¹⁷ Finally, a preference for privacy and *non*-regulation could have relevance for reasons that our modern western minds might consider unethical.

I would suggest that virtually every Diaspora Jew who conducted significant business throughout the Roman Empire would have been well aware of the amount of regulation and lack of secrecy involved when doing business through a Roman-style *argentaria*: i.e. with the professional/artisan class of banker. Therefore, it is quite likely that many of them would have preferred to operate under circumstances in which the banking facility they dealt with was *not* required by law to keep records that might have to be produced for public scrutiny at some later time. Cohen (1997:192–193) writes that scholars now understand how critical the so-called "underground economy" was to the effective functioning of ancient economies. And so, at the time under review, this more clandestine commercial activity was not regarded generally as "an immoral challenge to legitimate authority", but rather "a circumvention of governmental inefficiencies or absurdities, ranging from counterproductive or repressive systems of taxation to restrictions on the free operations of commerce". Consequently, a *trapeza*, a private bank both in description

17 Another possible benefit of (and reason for) selecting seven *Hellenistae* who qualified as entrepreneurs – to manage the primitive church *trapeza* – is implicit in Andreau's explanation (1999:151), mentioned above, that entrepreneurs and *faeneratores* were the only categories of financiers capable of organizing the highly lucrative maritime or bottomry loans.

and practice,¹⁸ would have been a very attractive proposition in first-century Jerusalem – for both the *trapezitai* and their clients.

10.4 The Business Conducted ‘Through the Bank’

Given the traditional, one-dimensional (i.e. charity-focused) interpretation of the text in Acts 6:1–3, we might be excused for thinking that a *trapeza* at the heart of the primitive church rarely operated as a bank in the truly commercial sense; and then perhaps only in order to offer loans to “needy” individuals to pay for personal items or necessities they could not afford without recourse to credit: commonly referred to as “consumption loans”.

However, the point that strikes us immediately from the available sources is that Greco-Roman *trapezai* were heavily if not primarily involved in loans for business purposes, referred to as “productive loans”; and Andreau (1999:74) comments that, because productive loans are not mentioned in the Roman literary texts, “some historians have even denied their existence, wrongly concluding that in antiquity credit amounted to no more than consumption loans”. Also, Verboven (2008:10) explains that “credit mediation by businessmen – *faeneratores* – was much more professionalised and developed than is generally recognised. ‘Professional’ financial intermediation was readily available from brokers and intermediaries for small and (very) large amounts of money. The non- or minimal involvement of deposit bankers in the extension of loans to businessmen, does not imply that the Roman financial system was inherently unsuitable to provide productive loans, it is merely a feature of the historically specific organisation of Roman credit markets”.

Of interest, Cohen (1997:15) provides us with the following helpful and comprehensive list of the types of activities that attracted loans from ancient *trapezitai*:

Bankers provided loans to purchase mining concessions and processing mills (Demosthenes 37, 40.52), to establish a cloth-making operation (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.7), to purchase land (*Inscriptiones graecae* 11² 2762; Ἀρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον 17[1961–2]; Khronika 35, no. 4), to help political leaders (Demosthenes 49.17, 23), to aid military operations (Demosthenes 49.6), to ransom friends (Demosthenes 53.9), to finance the import of lumber (Demosthenes 49.35–36), to assist business clients

¹⁸ As mentioned previously, Davies (2002:73–74) informs us that Greek private bankers employed the minimum of written accounts.

and their associates (Isokratēs 17.12, 38), to avoid creditors' execution on a ship (Demosthenes 33). In the dominant sphere of the Athenian economy, maritime trade, the *trapezai* held an important, perhaps a prime financing role.¹⁹ The banks also expedited commerce – and concurrently enlarged the effective money supply – through credit-enhancement devices that utilized bank deposits in place of coins.

Cohen (1997:17) also mentions a notable example of “trapezitic” involvement with the perfume business, which he asserts was a major Athenian obsession, and one that was heavily dependent on the availability of credit. However, since the initial group of converts to the Jesus-Believers sect were described as “devout”, it might be imprudent to claim that a *trapeza* operating in the primitive church was heavily involved in financing the luxury goods trade – although it did form a key component of the first-century economy in Jerusalem. Even so, from the above list, we may infer that, with the right skills, experience and connections, the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* serving the primitive church could easily have expanded the “business” (*chreia*) they were chosen to manage into some potentially lucrative areas. For example, the assertion by Pearson (1986:209–210) that Stephen (and others of the Seven) came from Alexandria implies not only that Stephen might have been a freedman-banker, but also that, under the management of the Seven Hellenists, the primitive church *trapeza* could have been involved in the all-important and highly profitable grain trade between the Diaspora Jews and Rome.

10.5 Small Tables Perhaps, but not Small Transactions

Cohen (1997:23) further attempts to correct the stereotypical view of ancient *trapezai* and their clients when he writes that “Bank loans were not limited to inconsequential sums, nor were borrowers marginal creatures who could obtain credit nowhere else”.

He goes on to inform us that, in the available literature (e.g. the speeches of Demosthenes), the smallest loan mentioned is 100 drachmas, which he calculates is equivalent to “perhaps 150 days' earnings [of a 'not unskilled

19 He explains (1997:28) that “Approximately two dozen references to maritime loans alone are contained in five speeches attributed to Demosthenes”; namely, Demosthenes 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36.

workman'] or the better part of a year's compensation at then-prevailing rates".²⁰ However, this particular amount turns out to be the smallest of a series of loans made to a single borrower that, over time, reached an aggregate total of around 4,200 drachmas.²¹ For evidence of the size of loans in the Roman era, we have an account from the Muziris papyrus of a maritime loan in which the principal amount is 6,926,853 sesterces.²² Also, even though Christ was not citing a specific transaction in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30), the single talent that, according to the 'master', should have been loaned out through the bankers (to earn interest) was worth 6,000 denarii, or 24,000 sesterces. Obviously, the amount of time, effort and expense involved in legal proceedings would normally prohibit disputes over trivial or minor sums from ending up in court. Therefore, we would not expect to find the kind of small amounts normally associated with charitable activity (i.e. donations/gifts for personal needs) mentioned in surviving legal documents of the day, which constitute our main source of information. As a consequence, in the context of an investigation into the possible financing activities of the primitive church congregation, these examples might be considered extraordinary and therefore inappropriate by some. However, they do indicate the amount and extent of credit extended by ancient *trapezitai*; and, on that basis, they are helpful.

10.6 From Foreign Coins to Foreign Trade

The abovementioned menu of banking services conducted by ancient *trapezitai* begs the question: how did local money-changers, sitting at small, portable tables, evolve into powerful and sophisticated financiers who could raise large sums from third parties and also participate in the profits of highly lucrative, international commercial ventures?

The answer is relatively simple. In the first instance, foreign coins would have been presented at a money-changer's table by foreign traders (*kapēloi*) who needed local currency to purchase local goods. In addition, some of those

20 This figure (equalling $\frac{2}{3}$ *denarius* per day) is given for labourers' wages in Athens in the fourth century BCE. In first-century Palestine, it was a full *denarius* per day.

21 See Demosthenes 49.22.

22 Rathbone (2000, in Temin 2002:18) considers the Muziris papyrus to be the "master contract" for a standard maritime loan of the early Roman Empire: "The careless grammar and syntax, the general sloppiness of the document, suggest a scribe copying the boilerplate of a standard contract. In other words, maritime loans were common enough in the early Roman Empire to have a standard form known to all the merchants and their clerks". Note: a single *sestertius* (plural, *sestertii*) was equal to one-quarter of a *denarius*.

foreign traders may have also required a loan in order to purchase the goods, along with some advice perhaps concerning local suppliers or manufacturers. On the other hand, it is possible that local merchants (*emporoi*) would also have required foreign currency – again perhaps in the form of a loan – in order to pay for foreign goods being landed by foreign ship-owners (*naukleroi*) who demanded payment in their own currency. Thus, over time, the humble, rather flimsy money-changer's table became an important focal point for various interlocking networks consisting of foreign and local merchants, as well as local financiers, producers, manufacturers and also ship-owners.²³ By way of corroboration, Rathbone (2007:317) informs us that, in the Roman period, "banks developed as the nodes through which other networks and individuals intersected, connecting the disparate economic corners of the Roman Empire into a global village".²⁴

10.7 The Question of Interest

In *Politics* 1258b, Aristotle describes money-lending as a "form of the business of getting wealth (that) is of all forms the most contrary to nature"; and, within the Christian tradition, the debate concerning charging or earning interest on loans has a long and tumultuous history.

For example, in *Summa Theologica* II (Question 78), Aquinas argued that lending with interest was "an inequality contrary to justice" because the presence of interest indicated that the lender received more value out of the transaction than did the borrower. Nevertheless, he condoned interest-bearing loans extended to and amongst merchants. On the other hand, Calvin (1991:139–141) claimed that "there is no scriptural passage that totally bans all usury", and urged his readers "not to judge usury according to a few passages in scripture, but in accordance with the principles of equity". Similarly, Gross (1975:53) writes that, "In his apologetic tract, *Milhemet Mitzvah* of 1245, Meir ben Simon of Narbonne argued that 'divine law prohibited usury, not interest'". Thus, it appears that, in order to understand the difference, we need to take the context into account.

23 In a similar manner, Lloyds of London, the international shipping and cargo insurance and reinsurance market, started from simple beginnings (in 1688) in Edward Lloyd's coffee-house, where merchants, traders and ship owners met together on a regular basis.

24 Rathbone (2007:310) also suggests that these networks "played a crucial role in enabling the development and functioning of a commerce that was large in aggregate, but composed of small agents and transactions".

In the OT, there are two Hebrew words used for “interest” or “usury”, נֶשֶׁק (*nešek*; e.g. Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36, 37; Psalm 15:5; Proverbs 28:8; Ezekiel 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12) and תַּרְבִּית (*tarbît*; e.g. Leviticus 25:36; Proverbs 28:8; Ezekiel 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12). And in the Vulgate, both words were translated by Jerome as the Latin word *usura*: i.e. ‘usury’, which is how it is rendered in the KJV and DRA. The word *nešek* comes from the root נָשַׁק (*nāšak*, ‘to bite’, in Deuteronomy 23:19, 20), which connotes economic predation. Hence, Calvin writes (1991:140) that this is “a form of usury so designated in Hebrew because of the manner in which it eats away at its victims”.²⁵ On the other hand, the word *tarbît* also means ‘increment, bonus, increase’, which is the legitimate outcome of any ethical mercantile effort, even if it is not always achievable. Nevertheless, the various OT prophetic tirades against *tarbît* imply that “increase” can be acquired by illegitimate and/or unethical means; and in that particular context, *tarbît* is rendered in the pejorative sense, e.g. as ‘unjust gain’, in Proverbs 28:8 (KJV). However, the arguments put forward by ben Simon and Calvin suggest that the word can also be used in a neutral and/or positive context.

Also, when considering the different aspects of this controversial subject, we need to keep in mind that the OT edicts against charging interest generally applied to loans extended to a “brother” in need,²⁶ which would be both understandable and commendable if the loan was for personal consumption purposes. As Gross (1975:52) explains, “Under the conditions of ancient Palestine, lending money to a fellow Israelite [Hebrew: אָח, *āh*, ‘brother’, which denotes a tribal as well as a familial relationship] usually meant extending credit to a needy farmer or craftsman for whom the return of the original amount plus the prevailing high interest was an extreme hardship”.²⁷ Hence, in poor and working class communities in Roman Egypt, for example, many loans were remunerated by work or service, rather than interest.²⁸ Nevertheless, the “brother” was expected to repay the principal amount loaned, because deliberate non-repayment was regarded as an act of theft, since Psalm 37:21 states that “the wicked borrow and do not repay”; and רָשָׁע (*rāšāʿ*, ‘wicked’) also

25 Interestingly, the majority of ET bibles render the word *nešek* as “excessive interest”. Therefore, it would appear that we cannot criticise the practice of lending with interest (at rates that might not be considered excessive) solely on the basis of the Hebrew scriptures – except where it refers to charging interest to a ‘brother’.

26 See Deuteronomy 15:7–8 and 23:19–20; also Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36–37.

27 Gross (1975:7) adds that, “during the First Temple period, the prevailing high rates of interest throughout the Middle East ranged from a minimum of 20–25% on cash loans and 33⅓% on grain loans, up to 100% and more for more risky credit or in periods of scarcity of capital”.

28 See Johnson (1936:452–454); in Andreau (1999:141).

means 'criminal'. Therefore, the extension of credit amongst Jewish (and also Christian) co-religionists can never be viewed as either a normal commercial transaction, or in an exclusively charitable light.

Furthermore, the existence of interest-free loan contracts in Greco-Roman literature should not be construed as proof of general opposition to charging interest because, even when interest was not stipulated in the contract, circumstantial evidence points to the likelihood that, on numerous occasions, interest was charged. For example, Camodeca (1992:165–198) contends that, even though certain loan contracts in the Suplicii archive do not mention interest, the interest amount was probably deducted from the gross loan funds handed over to the debtor. Hence the appearance of *atokos* and *aneu tokos* in loan contracts does not always mean that the loans were interest-free. In addition, examination of the Egyptian papyri by Foraboschi and Gara (1981:337), also Pestman (1971), suggests that interest might have been included in the sum to be repaid – a practice that, according to Guy (2012:7), still existed in London in the early part of the twelfth century, when “Flemish and Italian financiers [circumvented] the restrictions on usury by agreeing with the borrower to pretend that the original loan was for 10 or 15 per cent greater than it actually was”. Therefore, the ideological debate concerning interest cannot be decided on the basis of literary sources alone.

On the other hand, if it were a productive loan, in which credit was extended for business purposes, then the lender or, in our case, the “trapezitic business”, would be fully entitled to share (i.e. participate) in the profits from any commercial venture that was being financed. After all, Deuteronomy 23:20 permitted Jews to earn interest on money loaned to a “foreigner” (or “stranger”);²⁹ and Gross (1975:3) writes that, in the First Temple period, “most of the country’s mercantile activities were now conducted by strangers, mainly Phoenician and other Canaanites” who, as a rule, borrowed money in order to invest in a business for profit. Hence, as he further explains (1975:52), the Hebrew word כְּנַעֲנִי (*Kēna`aniy*, ‘Canaanite’) became a synonym for ‘merchant or trader’ in popular parlance – and is rendered thus in a number of ET bibles in Job 41:6, Proverbs 31:24 and Zechariah 14:21. Consequently, “Such a productive form of credit fully justified the original lender to participate in some form or other in the profits derived by the borrower”.

29 Nevertheless, the ancient arguments in favour of charging interest do not apply to loans earning *compound* interest (Latin: *anatocismus*; Greek: τόκος τόκων; literally, ‘interest on interest’), since Andreau (1999:92) reminds us that “Compound interest was frequently forbidden: the *senatusconsultum* of 51 BCE authorised only loans that were *perpetuo fenore*, that is to say which produced simple interest”.

The Greek word commonly translated as ‘interest’ is τόκος (*tokos*); however, Cohen (1997:45) explains that the Greek and English meanings do not match exactly, since *tokos* essentially conveys the idea of ‘bringing forth’ or ‘birth’,³⁰ and only metaphorically is extended in usage to cover “the produce or usance of money lent out”.³¹ Therefore, the correct rendering of *tokos* describes loans that do *not* attract interest (in the classic, time-related sense), but instead earn income (over and above the principal sum advanced) that is not time-related. This income might include: (a) participation in the profits derived from the business activity or venture being financed, which is how, as Cohen (1997:45, n. 22) reminds us, Islamic banks have been able to get around the Koran’s prohibition against charging interest; or (b) a negotiated fee that represents a fixed percentage of the amount advanced – both of which would *not* be considered as earning (time-related) interest. Hence, Cohen suggests that, “since *tokos* is not inherently time-related, it is best translated as ‘yield’ rather than ‘interest’”.³²

Cohen (1997:46–60) goes into great detail to explain the two main categories of loans extended in ancient Greece; in particular, fourth-century Athens: i.e. “landed” and “maritime” – both of which remained relevant during the period under examination, since he argues that “this binary commercial categorisation was so basic to Hellenic thinking that its perseverance in the Greek Mediterranean for centuries should not be surprising”.³³ These particular terms describe two distinct types of financing, each with a different category of income or return on the capital deployed. Landed loans provided income based on “payment for the use of money expressed as a percentage per unit of time” – which is obviously time-related and therefore earned interest in the classic sense. However, maritime loans involved a different kind of risk-reward profile and thus provided a much higher return on capital, such as we might find today in say project financing or venture capital investing.

30 Cohen’s source is Liddell-Scott *Lexicon*, s.v. τόκος.

31 Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary (2nd edition) defines ‘interest’ as “the rate of payment for the use of money expressed as a percentage per unit of time”.

32 The term “yield” is used in modern capital markets to denote a dividend paid annually (or semi-annually) to investors in a publicly-listed corporation. It is normally expressed as a percentage of the cost of the security, its current market value or its face value; and, while it offers us a more accurate translation for *tokos* than the word “interest”, it is still not precise enough.

33 Cohen (1997:48) explains that the Greeks even had separate locations for these two different forms of financing: the ‘landed’ commercial centre (*agora*) was situated inland, in the city proper, while the ‘maritime’ centre (*emporion*) was generally located on the coast.

Put simply, a landed loan would earn a “landed yield”, *tokos eggeios*, which usually amounted to one per cent (of the principal amount) per month,³⁴ but sometimes less; however, the income from such loans was always described in terms of being time-based. Temin (2002:19) confirms the longevity of this practice by mentioning frequent evidence from later Roman sources of loans at one per cent a month (or 12 per cent per annum), and cites Bogaert (2000) who has catalogued dozens of loans in Roman Egypt at the same rate.³⁵ On the other hand, maritime loans earned a “maritime yield”, *tokos nautikos*, which could be up to twice the principal amount of the loan in extreme cases and would obviously be categorised as usury if normal criteria were applied.³⁶ Even so, the detail we have available concerning this form of what I would call risk-financing, rather than lending, gives rise to some interesting speculation regarding the kind of financial activity that might have been conducted by a “trapezitic business” that adhered to Judeo-Christian conventions.

As the name suggests, maritime loans were originally associated with the financing of the extensive sea trade that centred on the Athenian port of Pireaus; and, in contrast to the “per cent per month” notation we find with time-related interest charged on landed loans, Cohen (1997:55) informs us that “In every case where information about the amount of return on maritime creditors’ funds is preserved, yield is calculated on the same fixed basis”:

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- 34 According to Ste. Croix (1974:46, n. 20), “The Greeks and Romans usually calculated their interest by the month (‘1 per cent interest’ in an ordinary Greek or Roman transaction would mean 1 per cent per month unless the contrary was stated)”. The Greeks usually referred to this standard rate (of 1/100th of the principal amount per month) as “a drachma [per mina]”.
- 35 In the *Lex Unicarica* (c.88 BCE), also referred to as the *Lex Cornelia Pompeia*, Roman law recognised an interest rate of up to 1 per cent per month (12 per cent per annum), known as the *centisimae usurae*. In 50 BCE this rate was set by senate decree as the maximum allowed, and stood until Justinian lowered the rates in 533 CE. However, Temin (2002:20) mentions examples of Roman rates above 12 per cent, and cites the statement by Livy (35, 7) that “prohibitions against higher rates were evaded in the late Republic by transferring the loans to foreigners who were not subject to rate restrictions”.
- 36 In 1515, in his book, *Tractates contractu quinque de centum*, John Eck defended 5 per cent as an acceptable rate of interest as long as (a) borrower and lender mutually agreed to the loan; and (b) the loan was for a *bona fide* business opportunity. On the other hand, Jones (e.g. 1989:121) informs us that, in England, before 1545 and between 1552 and 1571, all loans that carried interest were categorised as usury; however, from 1545 to 1552, and then from 1571 onwards, the term only applied to an annual interest rate above 10 per cent. Later, in the eighteenth century, according to Verboven (2008:11), the usury limit was set at first 6 per cent and then 5 per cent. Hence, in 1776, Adam Smith (1843: Book 2, Chapter 4.14) wrote that “In a country, such as Great Britain, where money is lent to government at three per cent and to private people upon a good security at four and four and a half, the present legal rate (five per cent) is as proper as any”.

i.e. a fixed percentage of the capital amount advanced.³⁷ He provides examples (1997:54–55) from Demosthenes 35 in which a loan for 3,000 drachmas yielded 675 drachmas (i.e. 22½ per cent of the capital advanced); and also Demosthenes 50.17 in which “a fixed yield of ‘one-eighth’ [12½ per cent] is payable on a maritime loan for a relatively short, one-way journey between Sēstos and Athens”.³⁸ Similarly, Andreau (1999:55) argues that the “fee” for a maritime loan in Roman times may also have been a fixed percentage, and cites an example with an even higher percentage than those given by Cohen: 33⅓ per cent (or one third) of the principal advanced.

Cohen (1997:53–54) explains that the profits associated with maritime loans were high because of the high risks associated with maritime commerce.³⁹ Therefore, maritime yield was “determined by contractual arrangements focusing on commercial considerations, especially degree of risk and anticipated profitability”. This is why a *tokos* of 12½, 22½ or even 33⅓ per cent of the capital advanced (for a term of usually less than a month) was not considered usurious, and so did not run afoul of any anti-usury laws that were in force at the time – or even centuries later. In fact, Cohen (1997:54, n. 69) further suggests that the recognition of this risk-reward differential (when compared to landed loans) may provide the reason why “maritime finance appears to have been excepted from the frequent efforts by the Roman authorities to place limits on maximum returns on loans”. Likewise, and of particular interest, Velissaropoulos (1980:302) states that “the Fathers of the Church considered [maritime loans] to constitute the only acceptable form of interest-bearing loans” – perhaps for the obvious reason that these loans did not bear interest in the classic, time-related sense, but rather *tokos*.⁴⁰

37 As illustrated by Demosthenes 33.6, which describes a maritime loan where 4,000 drachmas remained outstanding after the voyage was completed. Since there is no indication that the loan would continue (and incur daily or monthly charges whilst it remained unpaid), it is clearly describing a transaction with a fixed percentage return. Modern loans often attract a fixed, albeit very small percentage of the principal amount (usually 1½ per cent), called an arrangement fee. But then, it is small because it is charged in addition to the agreed interest rate applied to the loan. The ancestry of this fee can be traced back to Tudor times, when brokers, scriveners and lawyers, acting as intermediaries on behalf of the borrower and/or lender, demanded a fee for their services – over and above the interest paid.

38 Maritime loans generally covered sea voyages that, according to Cohen (1997:56, n. 83), seldom lasted more than a few weeks: e.g. Diodotos 3.34.7 states that a voyage from the Crimea to Rhodes could take as little as ten days.

39 Temin (2003:13) writes that “We cannot know if the [level of] risk changed over time. Archaeologists and ancient historians have tended to assume that the risk of shipwreck stayed constant”.

40 Essentially, *tokos* equates to the Hebrew *tarbîṭ*, meaning ‘increment, bonus, increase’.

10.8 Depositors and Lenders versus 'Participants'

At this higher level of risk-reward, the banker becomes more than just a lender; he then becomes a "participant" in the business opportunity, sharing in any profits derived from the venture.⁴¹

The Greek word is *κοινωνός* (*koinōnos*), which can be interpreted as 'partner', but which Cohen (1997:76, n. 71) advises is difficult to translate and rather takes on a connotation closer to 'participant'; hence, these collective investment undertakings were known as *κοινωνία* (*koinōniai*). However, as a "participant", the banker also participated/shared in the risks.⁴² In fact, it is one of the peculiarities of ancient maritime finance that, in return for a hefty fee/yield, the lender sometimes accepted most if not all of the risk. For example, as Cohen writes (1997:56): "under the contract at Demosthenes 35, certain variations in yield were provided, but were solely conditional upon marine contingencies,⁴³ unrelated to mere passage of time. Thus, if jettison of cargo were required, repayment was reduced relative to the proportion of cargo surviving. If the entire cargo were lost as a result of any of these contingencies, no repayment on the loan would be required". According to Andreau (1999:54),⁴⁴ in the Roman era, maritime loans were described as *pecunia traiectica*, 'money that travelled', or sometimes as *pecunia nautica*. He also confirms the acceptance of most if not all risk by the lender.

The money would be repaid, along with very high interest rates, only if the ship reached its destination safely. If the vessel or cargo was lost through no fault of the borrower, the latter remained under no obligation

41 As mentioned previously, Demosthenes 36.11 cites risk-taking as a central characteristic of the *trapeza*: a business generating "hazardous revenues" from other people's money.

42 Aquinas maintained (in *Summa Theologica* 11–11, Question 78, Article 2) that earning interest on a loan was permitted if the lender shared in the borrower's risk: "he that entrusts his money to a merchant or craftsman so as to form a kind of society, does not transfer the ownership of his money to them, for it remains his, so that at his risk the merchant speculates with it, or the craftsman uses it for his craft, and consequently he may lawfully demand as something belonging to him, part of the profits derived from his money".

43 Demosthenes 35.10 describes a maritime loan with interest set "at the rate of two hundred and twenty-five drachmae on the thousand" (22½ per cent). However, if the ship sailed after mid-September, a perilous season for navigation, which meant that the risk was greatly increased, the rate would be raised to "three hundred on the thousand": i.e. 30 per cent.

44 Andreau states that no-one knows precisely when maritime loans were introduced into Rome; however, they are first attested at the time of Cato the Elder, between 234 and 149 BCE.

to his creditor. The money-lender alone bore all the risks attendant upon sea-voyages. Those risks justified the very high rate of interest (*pretium periculi*).⁴⁵

However, not only did the *trapezitēs* become a ‘participant’ (*koinōnos*) in the risks and rewards of maritime loans, Gernet (1981:350, n. 14) suggests that the so-called depositors of a *trapeza* were also able to participate in the profits from the funds invested, even to the point of splitting them fifty-fifty with the banker. This is obviously not commercial banking as we might understand it today, but more like the “limited partnership” style of investment, in which the profit is shared between the general or managing partner and the various limited partners who provide the capital but are not involved in the actual management of the investments.⁴⁶ In legal parlance, “limited partner” does not carry the same meaning as “partner”, since a limited partner’s potential losses are, as the term suggests, limited strictly to the funds they invested in the particular venture.⁴⁷

The Roman equivalent of the Greek *koinōnia* is the *societas*, which, according to Rathbone (2007:314), was “the standard Roman legal form for a ‘partnership’ in any enterprise, which by the first century AD had developed very flexible rules – for instance, permitting unequal inputs of labour and resources by *socii*, and unequal shares of profit”.⁴⁸ Andreau (1999:151) refers to the *societas* as a kind of sleeping partnership “in which one of the associates provided the capital for another who was responsible for all the work and the management”.⁴⁹ Or, as Garnsey (1998:35) explains, “a partner might contribute *operae* (work) rather than *pecunia* (money) and nonetheless share the profits (and sometimes not even losses)”.⁵⁰ In other words, as with the earlier Greek

45 To be accurate, *pretium periculi* literally means ‘the price of the risk’; whereas the Latin for ‘interest’ (whether high or low) is *fenus*.

46 Chachi (2005:5) claims that the limited partnership was invented by the Babylonians; and, interestingly, Ferguson (2008:314) reports that most modern US hedge funds are incorporated as Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs).

47 Limited Partnerships today are usually “limited” not only in terms of liability but also scope (the investment is made for a specific venture: e.g. a real estate development, movie production, etc.) and/or time (the profits from single or multiple investments are distributed to the partners at the end of a specified period: e.g. five or ten years).

48 Rathbone cites Crook (1967).

49 He writes (1999:151) that the *societas* was the preferred method of investment for the Roman elite because “it gave them the chance to make a profit from commercial, industrial, or even financial businesses, without themselves having to adopt the life of ‘entrepreneurs’”.

50 Garnsey (1998:35) is citing a rule established by the juror Servius Sulpicius Rufus.

koinōnia, in a Roman *societas*, the banker/lender was also a “participant” in the business venture being financed.⁵¹

10.9 Speculations and Conclusions

From the above, as well as earlier evidence and arguments, we may reach certain hypothetical conclusions as to the possible scope and impact of the primitive church's *trapeza*, and also the activities of the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*.

In the first instance, any success the apostles may have achieved whilst serving at the ‘banking-tables’ would have occurred in a *reactive* sense, as a response to the demands of their particular marketplace and its constituents (i.e. the banking and financial needs of the members of the Jesus-Believers sect, numbering in the thousands) – rather than from any *proactive* effort on the part of the Twelve. After all, the *trapeza* did not represent the main focus of their calling, as evidenced by their complaint about it being a distraction (Acts 6:2). Nevertheless, because of the pressing need to provide their followers with an ethical alternative to the temple-banking service controlled by the corrupt Sadducee elite, the apostles found themselves (perhaps unwittingly) in charge of a powerful commercial vehicle that financed the economic growth of their community; and also, I would suggest, contributed significantly to its numerical growth. Then, at some point, the day-to-day management (or ‘daily ministration’) of the primitive church's *trapeza* proved to be too much of a burden, and was taken out of the hands of the ‘illiterate’ apostles and handed over to a cadre of experienced professionals: i.e. the seven Hellenist *trapezitai*.⁵²

51 Mills (1989:9) writes that the equivalent Jewish partnership arrangement is the *heter iska*, which “enables the partner providing money capital to enjoy a fixed share of the profits (or losses) from the joint venture, as well as share in the risks of losing all the capital”. According to Chachi (2005:11), the Islamic equivalents are the *mudarabah* (passive partnership) and *musharakah* (active partnership).

52 Interestingly, in Matthew 10:3 (in the KJV, ASV, BRG, DRA, GNV, JUB, NMB and WYC), the disciple Matthew is described as a “publican” (Latin: *publicani*). The Greek is τελώνης (*telōnēs*) which, according to Strong's, means ‘tax farmer’. Also, Luke 5:29 depicts Matthew as being affluent enough to host “a great feast” (at his house) with Christ as guest of honour, at which “a great company of publicans” (i.e. other tax farmers and/or tax collectors) were present. Therefore, as a tax-farmer, and also part of a network of tax-farmers, it is possible that Matthew had some banking (or at least some money-lending) experience, from which we may infer that he was one of the apostles who originally managed the primitive church's temple-banking style of *trapeza* – albeit not very proficiently, as highlighted by the problem mentioned in Acts 6:1. However, we may perhaps speculate that, at some point, either he no longer desired to continue to serve the primitive church in any kind of financial role, or else he could not (or did not wish to) cope

Luke's narrative suggests that the financial activities of the primitive church commenced as a series of individual, ad hoc transactions that were processed initially in a haphazard and perhaps less than professional manner – which eventually elicited some 'murmuring' from a key leadership group within the community. However, these activities would then have become better organised, and thus more efficient, as a result of the establishment of a dedicated, centralised facility through which the various transactions could be processed in a more professional and, no doubt, more profitable manner – by people with a more appropriate skill set. Consequently, it is not surprising to read in Acts 6:7 that, after the Seven were appointed, the primitive church went through a further phase of significant growth. From this, we may infer that the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* built on the unexpected and thus unplanned for success of the apostles' temple-banking operation via their implementation of an array of well-established and highly lucrative Greco-Roman private banking practices,⁵³ which would have included a substantial appetite for both risk and reward that dated back over four centuries. And in doing so, they turned an already flourishing banking operation into something even more commercially potent.

Now, since the operation of a "trapezitic business" carried no legal requirement to institutionalise its activities, the primitive church's *trapeza* could have operated quite successfully as a simple commercial enterprise that nonetheless allowed the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* full rein to practice their craft (*technē*) – enhanced no doubt by their spiritual gifts. Also, we may surmise from Acts 4:32 that the members of the nascent sect who sold their assets and 'placed' them at the feet of the apostles (and later into the hands of the Hellenist *trapezitai*) did not see themselves as depositors in the strict legal sense: i.e. retaining full rights of ownership of their funds or assets *after* they had been handed over to the bank. As a result, there would have been no legal requirement to keep client records; thus ensuring that the Hellenistic-style *trapeza* could avoid the administrative burden and bureaucratic oversight of a Roman-style *argentaria* – which meant that the primitive church's banking facility was able to operate outside the control of the Jerusalem Temple authorities, even though it was operating within the temple precincts. On that basis,

with the ever-increasing workload of the 'daily ministration'. Thus, for whatever reason, he seems to have been happy to relinquish his financial responsibilities in favour of the seven Hellenists chosen by the multitude 'to serve at the banking-tables'.

53 The long and prosperous history of Greek-style private banking dates back to before the fourth century BCE; and, according to Armstrong (1997:106), "the high finance of the Hellenes" was introduced into Jerusalem during the reign of Ptolemy II: between 282–246 BCE.

and taking into consideration its implied success, this particular "trapezitic business" could indeed have been capable of detaching a significant portion of the local economy from the social fabric of Jerusalem's traditional society, to use Cohen's words – just like its more ancient Athenian predecessors.

Obviously, we cannot claim with any certainty that all seven Hellenists were *trapezitai* in the style of Pasiōn et al, although there is a strong possibility that Stephen was a freedman, giving rise to speculation that he might also have been an experienced banker (e.g. an "entrepreneur" or perhaps a *negotiator*) with powerful contacts in Roman and/or Alexandrian financial and mercantile circles. Nevertheless, it was a requirement of their selection by the multitude that the Seven possessed certain attributes: e.g. "good and attested character and repute, full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3); as well as the *proven* ability to take care of the sort of "business" (*chreia*) that involved the distribution of funds – from which we may infer that they possessed the appropriate skills 'to serve in the bank' (*diakonein trapezais*).⁵⁴ In fact, as we find in the example of the bank owned by Pasiōn, in practical terms, all that would have been required to establish and build a thriving "trapezitic business" within the primitive church was the presence of just one or two experienced *trapezitai* amongst the seven Hellenists: e.g. Stephen and/or Philip.⁵⁵

Furthermore, it is likely that all seven would have put their heart and soul into the task of managing the *trapeza*; not only because they were doing it "as unto the Lord", but also because their appointment was necessitated by problems arising from the apostles' inability to cope with the task. This in itself would have been a powerful source of motivation for the Seven to ensure that their "trapezitic business" became a success. As to the full scope of the business activities of the primitive church *trapeza*, we can only speculate. We know that a significant number of the congregation consisted of Jews from the Diaspora who were resident in Jerusalem at the time. Therefore, just as both the city of Jerusalem and its temple benefited greatly from foreign trade, it is also possible that the primitive church may have benefited from similar mercantile

54 Barrett (1994:313) explains that, for Luke, the phrase, "full of the Holy Spirit", is not exclusively a theological categorisation: "the men appointed had to excel in spiritual and in natural gifts". Also, as mentioned previously, the verb *episkepasthe* in Acts 6:3 means to 'inspect, examine with the eyes'; from which we may infer that the Seven had demonstrated the practical skills required 'to serve in the bank' some time prior to being put forward by the multitude.

55 According to our understanding of the operations of an ancient *trapeza*, it seems likely that Stephen and perhaps also Philip were senior bankers in the style of the famous Pasiōn; whereas, the other five (who we never hear of again after Acts 6:5) may have operated as lower-level functionaries, like Phormiōn and Kittos. See Chapter 3.3, *Beyond the tables*.

activities conducted by Jewish Jesus-Believers who originated “from every land where there were Jews”.⁵⁶ If true, the community’s *trapeza* would have acted as both clearing house and financing vehicle for most if not all these transactions, especially if any of the Seven had experience in the area of foreign trade, which is a distinct possibility.

For these reasons, it is plausible that the numerous activities of the *trapezitai* included the extension of productive loans (i.e. for business/commercial purposes), which had the potential to earn high fees: e.g. up to 20 per cent or more of the transaction value – and toward which, we are told by Cohen (1997:53–54, n. 69), the authorities exhibited a particular level of flexibility that was “in sharp contrast to the inflexibility of other Roman business arrangements”. However, the *trapezitai* would have done so as “participants” in any potentially lucrative ventures (namely, partners/associates in a Greek-style *koinōnia*, Roman *societas* or Jewish *heter iska*), and not in the capacity of lenders as we would understand the term; thus avoiding any theological problems arising from the issue of charging interest.⁵⁷ Therefore, we may infer from the information gleaned from the sources cited above that a *trapeza* which served both the personal and mercantile needs of the primitive church community – and also exploited the significant commercial benefits of conducting business inside the temple precincts whilst operating beyond the control of the temple authorities – had the potential to be extremely successful and also highly profitable.⁵⁸ In fact, the excessive level of persecution targeted specifically against Stephen and his fellow-*Hellēnistae*, as depicted both implicitly and explicitly in the Lukan text, suggests quite strongly that this is precisely what occurred.

However, since I have expended a certain amount of effort in criticising traditional exegetical efforts for separating Peter’s Pentecost sermon and other passages in Acts from their economic context, it would be remiss of me if I did not at some point ensure that the above, historically-based economic discussion is fixed firmly within its proper spiritual setting. For instance, if the *trapeza* made a significant contribution to the prosperity of the primitive church community, we could speculate that it would have been seen by many, both within the congregation and without, as a human channel for the divine outpouring

⁵⁶ Acts 2:5, as interpreted by Bruce (1970:83).

⁵⁷ Mills (1989:16) writes that, “The earliest scholastic writings consistently regard the profiting from a partnership as not contradicting the [biblical] prohibition against interest, and the partnership contract was widely used in business from the twelfth century onwards”. He cites Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, II–II, Question 78, Article 2, as quoted previously.

⁵⁸ It is possible to speculate that the *trapezitai* engaged in lucrative loans with merchants, in line with OT edicts on lending, in order to make enough profit to be able to offer loans to “needy” congregation members at much lower rates, if not zero interest.

of "grain, oil and new wine", and thus integral to the fulfilment of the promises of material blessing within the salvation-restoration model. In other words, tangible confirmation of what Peter was alluding to in his reference to the prophet Joel at the beginning of his Pentecost sermon. As a consequence, the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* would quite likely have been regarded by their fellow Jesus-Believers as first-century equivalents of the ancient Levites who were the gatekeepers of the temple treasury: i.e. priest-bankers. And I would argue that the notion of this sacred-secular "liturgical" role is supported in part by the list of prerequisites and qualifications set down in Acts 6:3 (e.g. being "full of the Holy Spirit"),⁵⁹ and also substantiated by Luke's reference to the signs and wonders performed by Stephen (Acts 6:8),⁶⁰ who also exhibited a superior level of *sofia*, 'wisdom' (6:10); and by Philip in Samaria (8:6).

Therefore, the seven Hellenist *trapezitai* could indeed be described as *diakonoí*, although obviously not in the limited sense in which traditional exegesis has portrayed them, but rather as priest-bankers who served Yahweh on behalf of His people – in human partnership with the divine. After all, if we accept that *diakonein trapezais* in Acts 6:2 means 'to serve in the bank', we would then expect that the overarching ethos behind the workings of the primitive church *trapeza* demanded that the *trapezitai* should serve both Yahweh and their community – as opposed to being *self-serving*, like the Sadducee bankers based in the temple (and also like many of their modern secular counterparts). Unfortunately, the rampant success of the *trapeza* meant that it soon became a serious threat to the economic powerbase of the ruling class in first-century Jerusalem. So much so, the Sadducee elite had no compunction in dealing with the threat in a distinctly brutal manner. Consequently, this particular outpouring of "grain, oil and new wine" (i.e. economic prosperity) appears to have only lasted for three to three and a half years. Although, it is possible that it continued for some time after Stephen's death, albeit in a new location – as suggested by the possible partnering of Nicolaus and Barnabas in the large and prosperous Antioch congregation.

59 The precedent for this particular sacred-secular qualification is implicit in Pharaoh's rhetorical question in Genesis 41:38 regarding Joseph's suitability as a priest-banker: i.e. "Can we find this man's equal, a man in whom is the spirit of God?"

60 Barrett (1994:322) maintains that, with respect to "the working of signs and portents", Stephen was not inferior to the apostles.

Joseph-Barnabas: A Re-evaluation of His Role and Status

11.1 Getting the Recognition He Deserves

I have chosen to deal with the character of Joseph-Barnabas separately in order to, firstly, use an economic perspective to re-evaluate and hopefully expand the small amount of information we have about him; and, secondly, explore the possibility that this particular apostle deserves a higher status within the leadership of the primitive church than he has been assigned thus far.¹

Kollmann (2004:2) reports that Barnabas has *occasionally* received the recognition he deserves, and notes specifically Weiser (1981:138), who states that “Barnabas is one of the leading men of early Christian missionary history”. Likewise, Conzelmann (1973:158) writes that “In truth, [Barnabas] was one of the most important personalities of the primitive church”. Even so, if we accept that some form of banking facility was operating at the heart of the primitive church – which was patronised by a large group of Hellenist merchants and, after a time, controlled by a group of merchant-financiers drawn from their number – we are then obliged to re-evaluate any and all references to Barnabas within the text of Acts and other literature, both explicit and implicit, in the light of his position as perhaps the pre-eminent Hellenist-capitalist within that community. In fact, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:52) claims that there is evidence to suggest that Joseph-Barnabas may have been considered by the apostles as a kind of spiritual descendant of the patriarch Joseph, Israel’s premier and prototypical priest-banker; although she neither recognises nor appreciates the important banker-financier role of either character.

11.2 Initial Reference to Barnabas in the Acts Narrative

The first time we meet Joseph-Barnabas in Acts depends on the text being examined. In the Western and Alexandrian texts, e.g. Codex Sinaiticus (S01) and Codex Vaticanus (B03), his name first appears in Acts 4:36–37, when he is

¹ For example, Barrett (1994:57) refers to Peter, Paul, Stephen and even Philip as the “outstanding men” of the Book of Acts, but omits Barnabas.

singled out as a noteworthy contributor to the collective purse of the primitive church. However, according to Read-Heimerdinger (1998:34, 41ff.), in the text of Codex Bezae (D05), a text that she asserts is more authentic in terms of both a first-century and Jewish context,² the first reference to Joseph-Barnabas appears in Acts 1:23,³ when he – and not “Joseph called Barsabbas”, a character who, interestingly, is never mentioned again – is put forward as a suitable candidate to fill the position of twelfth apostle left vacant by the death of Judas Iscariot.

Foakes Jackson and Lake, and also Bruce note this reference, but dismiss it as either “doubtful” (Foakes Jackson and Lake, 1933:14), or a result of “confusion” (Bruce, 1990:111). Nevertheless, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:35) adds support for this reading with her argument that “the introduction [of Barnabas in Acts 4:36] is unusually abrupt with no preceding ἀνὴρ τις or any other such phrase as normally accompanies the initial introduction of a character into the narrative of Acts. The absence of an introductory phrase is understandable if this is, in fact, not the first mention but the second”. She also stresses the importance of this particular episode in the upper room which, perhaps because the two candidates described in the Alexandrian texts are not mentioned again and therefore do not seem to play any further role in the Acts story, tends to be overshadowed by the more dramatic events that follow soon after. She writes (1998:47) that:

The significance of replacing Judas is signalled in the Bezan text by the use of δέ, a connective in Acts which, at the start of an episode, indicates that it is being viewed as representing a new development in the story.⁴ In the B03 text, in contrast, no δέ appears until [Acts] 2:5, suggesting that

2 Read-Heimerdinger (1998:30) asserts that the Bezan text exhibits a “sustained use of methods of scriptural interpretation typical of those found in early Jewish literature”; whereas, “in the ordinary text of Acts the examples of Jewish exegesis that can be detected are sporadic and operate only in a limited way”. She also claims (1998:33) that “the text of Acts in Codex Bezae represents a tradition that is older than the tradition transmitted by the Alexandrian text”, and elsewhere argues (2002:355) that “the Bezan text dates from a time when there were people who were still familiar with the problems facing the earliest communities of the disciples of Jesus; when Jesus, Paul and other characters in the story were still alive in the memory of the people to whom the narrative was addressed; when the apostles had not become idealized figures”.

3 She writes (1998:41) that the reading of ‘Barnabas’ in Acts 1:23 is supported “by a few Greek miniscules and the Old Latin manuscripts as well as several other manuscripts of versions (6 pc it vgms)”. She also notes (1998:50, n. 41) that this reading “is attested by the following witnesses: 1831 it Vg OrL Boh Eth (in Boismard and Lamaouille, *Le texte occidental*, 11, ad loc.)”.

4 She cites Levinsohn (1987:104–106).

there all of the events of ch.1 are seen together as a single preparatory event leading up to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

This new development in the story is important because it took place in front of a gathering of “about 120” (Acts 1:15). As Read-Heimerdinger (1998:48) explains, “In later rabbinical writings, there is evidence that the presence of 120 males was the minimum legal requirement for the formation of a community large enough to elect a council for the making of formal and legal decisions”.⁵ Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:12), Marshall (1980:64)⁶ and Conzelmann (1987:10) also note this point, but while Conzelmann agrees that this number of men is “necessary to constitute a local Sanhedrin”, he argues that Luke did not have this in mind since there were women included in the group. However, Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:11) and also Lüdemann (1989:26) suggest that the Greek used for “certain women” makes it more likely to be a reference to the wives of the disciples, who would not perhaps be counted in the 120. Bruce (1990:106) also mentions that “D has σὺν ταῖς γυναῖξιν καὶ τέκνοις, ‘with their wives and children’, playing down the independent status of the women”; whereas, Lüdemann provides a fuller, more instructive explanation.

The following considerations suggest that *syn gynaixin* (1:14) is meant to denote the apostles’ wives (thus also Lake/Cadbury, *Beg.* 1v, 11); for purely linguistic reasons it seems more likely that the women should be seen as the wives of the disciples. Were they female followers of Jesus, one would have expected the article before *gynaixin*.⁷ Moreover, when the women disciples of Jesus are mentioned in the Gospel they are almost always defined more closely (*cf.* Luke 8:2f; 10:38–42; 23:49, 55; Luke 24:10 is an exception). Furthermore, in Acts Luke has no special interest in further mention of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, since they are not mentioned in the book.

5 Read-Heimerdinger cites *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 1.6, *cf.* *Yoma Sanhedrin* 1.4, which are referenced in Wilcox (1973:438–452).

6 Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:12) also comment on the fact that “*Mishna Sanhedrin* 1.6 enacts that the number of officers in a community shall be a tenth of the whole, and that 120 is the smallest number which can hold a ‘small Sanhedrin’”, while Marshall (1980:64) asserts that “in Jewish law a minimum of 120 Jewish men was required to establish a community with its own council; in Jewish terms, the disciples were a body of sufficient size to form their own community”.

7 Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:11) agree that “The absence of the article is noticeable and can scarcely be reproduced in translation. It may be an abbreviated form of the Attic phrase μετὰ γυναικῶν καὶ τέκνων, ‘with women and children’ (see Blass *ad loc.*). If so, it is practically equivalent to ‘with their wives’”.

When Peter, in his capacity as leader of the apostolic group,⁸ puts forward the two candidates to replace Judas (Acts 1:20), his preamble includes a prophecy from David: “Let his days be few, and let another take his office and charge” (Psalm 109:8). The Greek for “office” (in both NT and LXX) is ἐπισκοπή (*episkopē*, ‘overship, office, charge’); likewise, in Psalm 109:8, the Hebrew פָּקֻדָּה (*pāquḏā*) means ‘charge, office, oversight’, which together may be interpreted to cover more than just the office of apostle, and thus encompass Judas’ charge and oversight of the “purse” (i.e. finances) of Jesus and His disciples. On that basis, I would argue that whoever Peter had in mind to replace Judas was expected to fill the specific and specialist role of apostle-treasurer,⁹ and therefore needed to possess the appropriate financial skills and experience. The evidence that Barnabas may have had such expertise comes from the text of Acts and other sources.

11.3 A Spiritual Leader with Financial Skills and Experience

Jeremias (1969:105) suggests that Barnabas belonged to the group of Levites who were “outstanding in wealth and education”.¹⁰ Furthermore, there is no doubt that some Levites possessed significant financial expertise and experience because, even though this priestly group are associated primarily with temple music and cultic ritual, at one time some were also in charge of the Temple treasury-bank.

For example, 1 Chronicles 9 lists four Levites named Shallum, Akkab, Talmon and Ahiman, of whom Shallum was the chief (9:17); and “these Levites, the four chief gatekeepers, were in charge of the chambers and treasuries of the house of God” (9:26). Furthermore, in 1 Chronicles 23 and beyond, we find a detailed account in which King David assigns people to various positions

8 Most commentators accept that the order of names in Acts 1:13 indicates Peter’s premier rank, with Barrett (1994:95) citing Acts 1:15 as “the first time Peter stands out as spokesman and leader”. This argument is supported by Metzger (1965:288), who states that, in Acts 1:24, “and elsewhere in the Western text, one recognizes clearly the later point of view, according to which Peter rules the church with the authority of the monarchical episcopate”.

9 Judas is the only member of the original Twelve who is described as occupying a particular role or office: i.e. γλωσσόκομον ἔχων (*glōssokomon echōn*, ‘keeper of the money-bag or purse’), which is translated specifically as ‘treasurer’ in John 12:6 (VOICE) and John 13:29 (TLB, MSG, NLT, OJB).

10 Kollmann (2004:6) adds that “Most probably Barnabas was one of the many Diaspora Jews who, on account of prosperity gained far from the motherland, had the means to move to Jerusalem”.

within the temple he was planning. In particular, 26:20–26 lists the men who were put in place “over the treasuries of the house of God and the treasuries of the dedicated gifts”.¹¹ And, in this list, “Of the Levites, Ahijah was over the treasuries of the house of God and the treasuries of the dedicated gifts” (26:20).¹² Later, in post-exilic times, we read in Ezra 8:33 that, on the fourth day after his arrival in Jerusalem, Ezra and his twelve specially-chosen priests presented the “650 talents of silver, and silver vessels valued at 100 talents, and 100 talents of gold” they had transported from Babylon (8:24) to the priests, Meremoth and Eleazar, and also “Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui – the Levites”.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, in Nehemiah 13:13, a Levite by the name of Pedaiah is listed as one of the “treasurers over the storerooms”. Schaper (1997:202) calls them “the Temple Treasury Committee”, and asserts that it is obvious from the genealogy given for Hanan, the assistant to the treasurers, that he is also a Levite.¹³ He goes on to explain (1997:204) that “the committee members oversaw not just the collection of tithes but also that of Persian imperial taxes”, thus ascribing to these particular Levites a secular fiduciary role, possibly as tax-farmers.¹⁴ However, by the first century CE, supervision of the Temple treasury-bank had been taken over by various family members of the High priests and, according to Jeremias (1969:198), “Along with political power, the priestly aristocracy through family influence obtained possession of the administration of Temple finances, a circumstance of no small importance”.

From the above, it is evident that, over the centuries, particular Levites acted in a banker-like capacity: e.g. they were entrusted with the safekeeping of large amounts of public funds. Consequently, the choice of Barnabas (along with Saul) to supervise the collection of the famine relief fund at Antioch (Acts 11:29–30), which was organised on behalf of the brethren in Judea, may have been based on the traditional role of Levites as treasurers, or the fact that this particular apostle exhibited some sort of financial acumen – or perhaps both. Moreover, we know that Joseph-Barnabas was a land-owner

11 These considerable gifts were dedicated by “King David, the heads of the father's houses, the officers over thousands and hundreds, and the commanders of the army” (1 Chronicles 26:26).

12 In LXX 1 Chronicles 9:26, 26:20, 22, 24, as quoted above, the word used for ‘treasure’ or ‘treasuries’ is *θησαυρός* (*thésaurus*), which Feldman et al (2000:25) explain is the ‘treasury’ where the largely cash holdings of the Temple were kept – as opposed to *κειμήλια* (*keimēlia*), which refers to the sacred treasures of the temple.

13 Schaper is citing Rudolph (1949).

14 See n. 22 in Chapter 6.4 for an explanation of the link between tax-farming and money-lending/banking.

(Acts 4:36–37);¹⁵ and that, according to Jeremias (1969:33), land in and around Jerusalem was expensive.¹⁶ Kollmann (2004:11) is ambivalent on the question of whether the plot of land that Barnabas sold was located in Cyprus, or one purchased or inherited in Jerusalem; however, he cites Schneider (1980:367) who asserts that “Barnabas – as a Diaspora Jew resident in Jerusalem – possessed a field (in the area around the city)”.

Marshall (1980:110) also notes that the location of the field is not clear, but prefers somewhere in Palestine, since τῷ γένει in Acts 4:36 “need not imply anything more than that Barnabas had been born in Cyprus”. Nevertheless, even if the apostle’s plot of land was located in Cyprus,¹⁷ funds raised from a local sale on the island would then need to be transferred to Jerusalem. If so, Barnabas either had personal experience or else contacts with the expertise to handle this kind of “cross-border” financial arrangement; something usually conducted by *trapezitai*. That said, as “a native (τῷ γένει) of Cyprus”,¹⁸ it is quite likely that Barnabas – a Jew from the Diaspora who had amassed enough wealth to live in Jerusalem where the cost of living was high – gained a great deal of financial experience and expertise during the years spent accumulating the family fortune.¹⁹

15 Interestingly, Acts 4:37 states that Barnabas “sold a field [ἀγρός, *agros*, ‘a piece of land’] that belonged to him”, and the use of the indefinite article could perhaps indicate that he owned more than one plot of land; however, this cannot be substantiated from the text.

16 Jeremias asserts that “prices for land around Jerusalem were particularly high”, citing the *Jerusalem Talmud*, Yoma 4.1, 41b; cf. Levy II, 369b under *keseeph*.

17 Numbers 35:2–7 stipulates that the only plots of land Levites are allowed to own (in the conquered lands of Canaan) are “pasturelands around the cities’ walls”, consisting of an area reaching “from the wall of the city [i.e. one of the 48 cities allocated to the Levites] and outwards 1,000 cubits [500 yards] round about”. However, according to Leviticus 25:34, these fields/pasturelands “may not be sold; it is [the Levites’] perpetual possession”. On that basis, the field that Barnabas sold could only have been located “in the area around the city” of Jerusalem, as Schneider suggests, if this ancient law had either been revoked or had fallen into disuse. Thus, it is indeed possible that the field was located somewhere outside the conquered lands (e.g. in Cyprus), where this particular law did not apply.

18 Conzelmann (1987:36) explains that “τῷ γένει, ‘a native of,’ does not mean nationality (e.g. a Cypriot), but denotes the place of birth (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.142)”; and Kollmann (2004:2, n. 5) asserts that the early church accepted this as self-evident. However, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:36), argues that, in Codex Bezae, “τῷ γένει does not qualify Κύπριος but Λευίτης. This implies that Barnabas’s family were not natives of Cyprus at all but lived there as Jews in exile, the situation of most of the many Jews in the Diaspora”.

19 In his consideration of the funding sources of the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul, Dods (1905:337) writes that “With what provision for their journey they were furnished, Luke does not tell us [...] In passing rapidly from place to place, Paul could scarcely have found work at his trade”. However, if we accept that Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, a member of a wealthy family, and a prosperous capitalist in his own right, the

In addition, in Colossians 4:10 (KJV), Paul refers to John-Mark as “Barnabas’ sister’s son”;²⁰ and, if correct, this would make Barnabas the brother of Mary, mother of John-Mark, and consequently a member if not the scion of what we are led to believe was a wealthy family.²¹ For instance, in Acts 12:11–16, we have the account of Peter escaping from jail and walking to Mary’s house – which Edersheim (1904:47) refers to as a better class of dwelling and Kollmann (2004:6) describes as “substantial” – where “a large number (of the congregation) were assembled together and were praying” (Acts 12:11).²² In verse 13, we read that Peter knocked on what is described as either “the gate of the porch” (AMPC) or “the door of the courtyard” (MSG),²³ and a maid by the name of Rhoda came to investigate. If we consider the price/value of property in first-century Jerusalem, the fact that Mary’s house had a porch and/or courtyard, was spacious enough to accommodate a considerable number of people,²⁴ and was also manned by servants, suggests that her family, which obviously included her brother, were notably affluent.

11.4 His Rejection in the Vote to Replace Judas

As a Levite residing in Jerusalem, Barnabas obviously enjoyed a particular status within the religious and social hierarchy of the capital’s Temple-centric society.

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- answer to this funding question becomes glaringly obvious, and may also provide the underlying reason why he, as an apostle (in tandem with Paul), was able to renounce the normal right of missionaries to be supported financially by the communities they served.
- 20 The Greek ἀνεψιός (*anepsios*) appears only once in the NT, and is translated as ‘niece’ or ‘nephew’ in Thayer’s Lexicon, and both ‘cousin’ and ‘sister’s son’ in Strong’s. Many ET bibles translate *anepsios* as ‘cousin’ – inspired perhaps by the rather eccentric rendering in LXX Numbers 36:11 of ‘father’s brother’s sons’. However, Kollmann (2004:36) portrays Barnabas as an older man (in comparison to Paul), when he writes that “The identification of Barnabas with Zeus [by the pagans in Lystra was] attributable to Barnabas’ greater age”; and on the other hand, in 1 Peter 5:13, the apostle calls John-Mark μου υἱός, ‘my son’. Thus, we may infer from this that John-Mark is markedly younger than Barnabas, which makes ‘nephew’ a logical rendering.
- 21 Kollmann (2004:6) comments that “Joseph-Barnabas apparently possessed not inconsiderable wealth and was in this regard not alone in his family”.
- 22 Lüdemann (1989:146) suggests that “Mary’s house in Jerusalem is probably a historical fact”.
- 23 Also, ‘the outer gate’ (CEB, NET, NRSV) and ‘the door of the gateway’ (RSV). The Greek here for ‘gate’ is πυλῶν (*pylōn*), which means (1) ‘a large gate: of a palace’ (in Luke 16:20), or (2) ‘the anterior part of a house, into which one enters through the gate, porch’ (in Acts 12:13).
- 24 Thayer translates ἱκανός (*hikanos*) in Acts 12:12 as ‘a considerable number’.

Furthermore, if we accept the 'Barnabas' reading in the Bezan text of Acts 1:23, which depicts him as one of the two candidates put forward to replace Judas, he would also have been a member of the core group of Christ's early followers, since Peter states (as part of the list of the candidates' qualifications) that, along with Matthias, he is one of "the men who have accompanied us [apostles] during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us – from the baptism of John at the outset until the day when He was taken up from among us" (Acts 1:21–22). This argument is supported by Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius and Epiphanius, who speak of Barnabas as one of the seventy sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1.²⁵ Nonetheless, all this evidence concerning his status and suitability leaves us with the question as to why Barnabas was *not* selected to fill the role of apostle-treasurer left vacant by the death of Judas.

Read-Heimerdinger (1998:59) takes great pains to explain that, in Codex Bezae, the process in which Matthias was selected – and Barnabas rejected – is not depicted as being divinely orchestrated, as we are led to believe from the Alexandrian texts. According to Conzelmann (1987:12), in the ancient practice that allowed for the possibility of divine intervention, the lots were shaken in a cloth bag (Proverbs 16:33)²⁶ or in a vessel (Livy 23.3.7)²⁷ until one fell out; and Read-Heimerdinger (1998:59) writes that "the usual expression in the LXX is to 'throw' (βάλλω) lots for someone or something, and designates a procedure involving chance which leaves responsibility for the outcome to God". However, she then explains that "The text of Acts, in contrast, uses ἔδωκαν κλήρους (v. 26), meaning that they 'gave' their lots". If correct, it means that, even though those present may have prayed for divine guidance, Acts 1:26 depicts an archetypal voting procedure involving human choice. Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:15) also inform us that "The method employed by the Jews was to put the names written on stones into a vessel and shake it until one fell out. But the proper verb [here] would be ἔβαλον, and ἔδωκαν does not fit into the picture. It is possible, therefore, that the meaning may be 'gave their votes'".²⁸ On the other hand,

25 See *Hypotyposeis* 7 and *Stromateis* 2.20.11, cited in Read-Heimerdinger (1998:53); also *Ecclesiastical History* I 12.1; II 1.4 (Eusebius) and *De incarnatione* 4.4 (*Panarion* xx) (Epiphanius); cited in Kollmann (2004:9).

26 Proverbs 16:33 (AMPC) states that "The lot is cast into the קִיָּה [*héq*, 'bosom (or lap) of a garment'], but the decision is wholly of the Lord (even the events that seem accidental are really ordered by Him)".

27 Livy records that Pacuvius Calavius "took his seat, and, the names having been thrown together into an urn, he ordered that the name which had the lot to fall out first should be proclaimed, and the person brought forward out of the senate-house".

28 According to Rius-Camps and Read-Heimerdinger (2004:331), "The fact that «they gave their lots» and that the «lot» fell on Matthias only makes sense if it is a matter of a genuine

while Bruce (1990:112) writes that “One might have expected ἔβαλον rather than ἔδωκαν”, he does not agree with the interpretation of ‘gave their votes’.

Interestingly, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:60) speculates that the main reason why Barnabas was rejected was because he was a Hellenist, and did not originate from Palestine like the rest of the apostles. She further suggests that his status as a Levite might also have been problematic; and we might infer from this that many of those gathered may have been influenced by the fact that Jesus did not choose any member of the Levitical priesthood to be part of His original core team of twelve. Nevertheless, whatever the reason for the rejection of Barnabas by the majority of the “120”, the outcome of the vote seems to have left the Twelve with a financial skills gap that resulted in the competency or workload problem highlighted in Acts 6:1. It is also significant that he was put forward by Peter, the spiritual leader of the community, as his preferred candidate, as Read-Heimerdinger (1998:57) argues: “Since Barnabas, with his qualities, is the first named, it is fair to suppose that Luke means that Peter thought that he was the most fitting candidate, that Barnabas would have been his choice”.²⁹

If true, this and other passages in Luke’s text would suggest that Barnabas was not only eminently qualified to take up the reins of apostle-treasurer, as argued above, he also enjoyed an extraordinarily close relationship with Peter, who obviously admired and respected him. No doubt, this admiration and respect was reciprocated, and Peter’s reason for seeking refuge in the house of Mary, the sister of Barnabas, after being freed from prison (Acts 12:12), may stem from the possibility that he enjoyed not just the friendship but also the personal patronage of Barnabas and other members of his wealthy family.³⁰

ballot. The expression cannot be construed as the process of «casting lots» which is often mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures but using a different verb than the one used here”.

29 Read-Heimerdinger (1998:50) states that, “In the Bezan text of [Acts 1:23], it is Peter alone (singular ἑστῆς) who puts the two names forward”.

30 We know from Braund (1989:137) that patronage was all-pervasive in Roman society; and, according to Moxnes (1993:267 and 2004:42), wealthy members of the early Christian communities served as patrons “by opening their houses as meeting places” (e.g. Acts 12:12). Hansen and Oakman (1998:79) describe Barnabas’ sale of his field as the act of a “patron”; and Bartchy (1991:315–316) describes Barnabas as “one of the significant patrons in the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem”. Therefore, it is plausible that his patronage encompassed both the institutional and the personal – in the form of Peter (and perhaps others).

11.5 A Power-broker with Impregnable Position in Jerusalem and Beyond?

From Acts 6:1, we learn that the Hebrew apostles encountered problems and perhaps some embarrassment from their handling of the community's financial affairs, which prompted the Hellenist leaders to arrange a private meeting to discuss their concerns in this area; and I would argue that Barnabas was one of the Hellenist leaders at that meeting. Also, the fact that the affair was handled in a wise and discrete manner is compatible with what we know of the man's character from later accounts in Luke's text.

In fact, because of his pre-existing and close relationship with Peter, Barnabas would have been the most likely person to "broker a deal" between the Hellenist leadership and the Hebrew apostles, in an effort to find a practical solution to the problem highlighted in Acts 6:1–2.³¹ After all, we are told that Barnabas sold an expensive piece of real estate in order to provide the collective purse of the primitive church with a significant amount of funds. This would have put him in a strong position to recommend to the Hebrew apostles that, since they could not cope with the burgeoning workload of the new sect's *trapeza* (of which Barnabas was for all intents and purposes a major contributor-investor, a position that has always carried a great deal of influence), it would be better to hand over the control and day-to-day operations to a cadre of financial professionals: i.e. seven *trapezitai* chosen by the multitude. If correct, this makes Barnabas something of an *éminence grise* within the primitive church community; a person of considerable behind-the-scenes influence,³² especially in economic matters it would seem: a power-broker in the truest sense.

This markedly more elevated status of Barnabas within the primitive church is important in itself, but still, I would suggest, does not represent the full extent of his influence. Therefore, we also need to take into consideration whatever position or status he might have occupied within the wider political-economic

31 This is in keeping with Barnabas' reputation as a "bridge builder", a characterization described by Evans (1978:248–250). Kollmann (2004:13, 62) asserts that, as a Diaspora Jew with close ties to the motherland, "Barnabas straddled the line dividing Hellenist and Hebrew"; and, because he enjoyed the respect of both groups, he therefore "had an important mediating function between these two factions of the early Christian community". His sources are Schenke (1990:79) and Raisanen (1995:1468–1514).

32 Concerning Barnabas, Read-Heimerdinger (2002:326) writes that, "For all his qualifications and qualities, his role is nevertheless always one of discreet activity in the background".

hierarchy of Jerusalem and beyond,³³ using a combined economic and political perspective to interpret various references in scripture to the person and his background – both explicit and implicit. For example, when the surviving *trapezitai* and other Hellenists were driven out of Jerusalem during the period of persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1), Barnabas, a high profile Hellenist-capitalist, was able to remain in the capital, seemingly unmolested. It would seem that this exemption from persecution also extended to his family; particularly his sister, Mary, whose house (mentioned in Acts 12:12–13) does not appear to be one of those that Saul entered in order to drag out the men and women and commit them to prison (Acts 8:3).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Barnabas was not in Jerusalem when Herod Agrippa decided to “stretch forth his hands to afflict and oppress and torment some who belonged to the church” – first killing James the brother of John with a sword, a style of execution normally reserved for political cases,³⁴ and then imprisoning Peter (Acts 12:1–3).³⁵ We may infer from the timing of this event that Agrippa waited until Barnabas was out of the way before he made his move, which raises some important questions and also fuels further speculation. Was Barnabas’ ability to escape persecution merely a matter of coincidence? Or was he perhaps so powerful economically and so well-connected politically that he was, in a word, untouchable? If so, what possible circumstances would have caused both the Sadducee elite and Herod Agrippa to leave Barnabas alone, and also avoid a confrontation with him?

33 Assuming that the ‘Barnabas’ reading in Acts 1:23 (of the Bezan text) is correct, then the fact that he is also called by the Latin name, *Iustus*, is “an indication that his qualities were recognized not only by his own Jewish people but also in Roman society” (Read-Heimerdinger, 1998:52).

34 Cassidy (1987:48, n. 14, expanded on p. 183) informs us that James’ execution “by the sword” indicates capital punishment for a political crime. His sources include Rackham (1904:176), Williams (1953:199) and Ricciotti (1959:184–185). Brandon (1968:48) and Derrett (1970:340) also argue that Luke’s specific reference to a sword being used as the means of execution shows that the charge against James was political, which Barrett (1994:575) interprets as meaning that Herod saw the Christian movement as a political threat.

35 Parker (1964:169–170) writes that “there is not the faintest hint elsewhere, in Acts or the epistles, that Saul and Barnabas partook of that terrible experience”, which conflicts with the comment in Acts 12:25 that Barnabas and Saul were *returning* from Jerusalem; thus implying their presence in the city when James was executed. However, Parker argues that Luke’s text has been mistakenly altered, and that “Barnabas, Mark and Saul were at Antioch [...] when Agrippa harassed the Jerusalem Church”.

11.6 The Cyprus Connection

In the first instance, we can establish commercial and/or family links, both direct and indirect, between the Herodians, their court and/or the Sanhedrin on one side, and important Cypriot Jews, which could have included Barnabas, on the other.

From 1 Maccabees 15, we have evidence of a Jewish community on Cyprus dating back to around 140 BCE, and even possibly as early as the third century BCE, according to conjecture by van der Horst (2006:28–29).³⁶ From Josephus, we learn that, during the reign of Ptolemy IX Soter II (between 142 and 80 BCE), the Jews living on Cyprus were “flourishing” (*Antiquities* 13.284); and that, in 12 BCE, Herod the Great obtained a concession from Augustus for half the copper-mines in Cyprus (*Antiquities* 16.128–129). As a consequence, Smallwood (1976:412) argues that the commercial prospects arising from the copper trade would have encouraged Jewish migration to the island. From Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.131), we also learn that Alexandria, granddaughter of Herod the Great, married a prominent Cypriot named Timios, who van der Horst (2006:29) describes cautiously as “probably a Jew”. Furthermore, Kollmann (2004:6) reports evidence from the Talmud that caraway seed from Cyprus was shipped to Palestine on a regular basis; also, that Jewish Cypriots provided the wine used as part of the burnt offering on Yom Kippur, and sent an annual gift of wine to the Temple as well,³⁷ which means that wealthy Cypriot merchants, some of whom would have been friends and/or associates of Barnabas, were integral to the economic activity surrounding the Temple cult.³⁸

In addition, Luke’s gospel account provides a possible link to the royal household/court through a notable financial supporter of Jesus and His disciples: Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was the ἐπίτροπος (*epitropos*, ‘procurator, steward or household manager’) of Herod Antipas.³⁹ Consequently, if we

36 van der Horst’s evidence comes from a reference in 1 Maccabees 15:15 & 23 to “letters to kings and countries”, in which the consul of Rome sent a warning not to harm the Jews anywhere. He suggests that this implies, firstly, the presence of Jews on Cyprus for some time before 140 BCE; and, secondly, a Jewish community of significant size – comparing the situation on the island to that of Delos and Crete.

37 Kollmann is citing Neubauer (1868:369) and Oberhummer (1903:23).

38 Kollmann cites *p. Dem.* 2:1 [22b] and *p. Yoma* 4:5 [41d]. Evidence of further commercial links between Cyprus and Jerusalem can be found in the report by Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.51–53) that Queen Helena of Adiabene paid for a cargo of dried figs to be brought from Cyprus to alleviate the famine in Jerusalem in 45 CE.

39 Luke 8:2–3 states that Joanna (along with Mary Magdalene, Susanna and “many others”) was part of a group of female supporters of Christ’s ministry who had been “cured of evil

accept the ‘Barnabas’ reading in the Bezan text of Acts 1:23, with all its implications, she – and perhaps her husband as well – would have known this particular apostle from the early days of Christ’s ministry. From all this, we can speculate that, because of the all-important trade in copper, wine, dried figs and caraway seed, for example, plus the possible connection to Herod’s court through Chuza (also Manean, as discussed below), as a ‘native’ of Cyprus and a member of a wealthy and prominent Cypriot Jewish family, there are likely to have been a number of possible links between the family and/or associates of Barnabas (in both Cyprus and Jerusalem) and the Herodians and their court, as well as the priestly and lay aristocrat members of the Sanhedrin – connections that, economically and politically speaking, may have been powerful enough in themselves to protect him and also single him out as someone who should not be antagonised.

11.7 The Antioch-Cyprus-Cyrene Network

Various scholars, such as Downey (1961), Haenchen (1976:264), Brown and Meier (1983:33), Zetterholm (2003:93, 122), Barnett (2002:264 and 2008:89) and Kollmann (2004:21), have speculated that, after the martyrdom of Stephen, when the Hellenist Jesus-Believers were driven out of Jerusalem and “scattered abroad” (Acts 8:4), Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch – one of the Seven Hellenist *trapezitai* mentioned in Acts 6:5; and thus, I suggest, a close associate of both Stephen and Barnabas – would have returned to his native city.

According to Josephus (*War* 3.29), Antioch on the Orontes had been the capital of the Roman province of Syria since 64 BCE, and was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria.⁴⁰ Bruce (1990:224) mentions this as well and further explains that Antioch was an important commercial centre as well as a political capital, since “the produce of Syria and lands further east passed through it on its way to the west”. Also, Kollmann (2004:19) estimates that, in the NT period, the city had a total population of around 500,000; and Josephus (*War* 7.41–62) informs us that Antioch contained a substantial Jewish population. Furthermore, Witherington (1996:203) provides an instructive summary of the major role that Antioch played in the development

spirits and diseases” by Jesus; and this may have drawn her grateful husband into some sort of regular contact with Christ’s inner circle of followers – which may have included Barnabas.

40 Cited by both Kollmann (2004:19) and Witherington (1996:203).

of the early Church, as it was, firstly, the sponsoring church for the Western mission (Acts 13:1–3); secondly, the place where the debate over Gentile membership came to a head (14:26–15:2); thirdly, where, after an extended tenure (11:25; 15:35), Barnabas and Paul separated; and, finally, where Paul made a separate visit (18:22) before beginning his final European tour.

In Acts 11:19–20, Luke states that some “men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on returning to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks also,”⁴¹ proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus”;⁴² and it is thought that these Cyrenians were some of the group listed amongst the devout Jews listening to Peter’s Pentecost sermon who came from “the parts of Libya about Cyrene” (Acts 2:10). Since Acts 6:9 implies that Cyreneans were amongst Stephen’s persecutors, it seems plausible that Jesus-Believers from this area would consider themselves at risk of suffering at the hands of their fellow-countrymen, and so flee with Nicolaus to Antioch after Stephen’s execution. When the rumours of what was happening in Antioch reached the apostles in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to investigate; and during the time he was there, “a large company was added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24). Witherington’s commentary on Acts 11:24 (1996:370) suggests that Luke views Barnabas as equal to Stephen: e.g. full of the Holy Spirit and faith (*cf.* Acts 6:5). He also states that Barnabas is the only man in Acts specifically described as ἀγαθός (*agathos*, ‘good, upright, also honourable’), which Luke also uses to describe Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50).⁴³

As “a native of Cyprus”, Barnabas appears an obvious choice for this important mission; however, there is another likely rationale implicit in his relationship with Nicolaus. After all, the persecution and scattering of the Hellenist believers and *trapezitai* that occurred following the execution of Stephen would have led to the demise of the banking facility at the heart of the congregation in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is possible that one of the reasons why Barnabas (with his known financial skills and experience) was sent to Antioch by the apostles was to help Nicolaus establish a new banking operation for

41 The word ‘Greeks’ here is Ἑλληνιστάς, from Ἑλληνιστής (*Hellenistēs*, ‘a Greek-speaking Jew’), from which we may infer that this group were Jews and not Gentiles.

42 The majority of ET bibles state that the men of Cyprus and Cyrene either ‘went to’ or ‘came to’ Antioch; however, the AMPC and NLV state that they were ‘returning’ (*eiserchomai*) there. The root is *erchomai*, used both of persons arriving and returning, which suggests that either this group had prior links with the city (i.e. they had previously resided and/or conducted business there), or simply that they started their missionary journey in Antioch and later returned there after visiting Phoenicia and Cyprus.

43 Ste. Croix (2001:426) cites a poem by Solon to suggest that *agathos* not only means ‘good’, but also indicates a member of the upper class. Likewise, according to Liddell-Scott, *agathos* can be used to denote persons ‘of noble birth’ or ‘distinguished’ by social position.

the Jesus-Believers' sect in this important and wealthy commercial centre – in order to service the “large company” of converts, who may have included numerous affluent if not wealthy Jewish-Hellenist merchants. If true, this strategy proved crucial when the mother church in Judea needed famine relief (Acts 11:29–30).⁴⁴ There is also a possible connection with Cyrene through Lucius (Acts 13:1); and furthermore, Coptic tradition links Barnabas to this city in North Africa through his sister, Mary, and nephew, John-Mark.⁴⁵

Finally, to establish the prominent position that Barnabas occupied within the Antioch congregation, Kollmann (2004:26) argues that “The ancient list of offices and names found in Acts 13:1 reflects the structure and hierarchy of the Christian community of Antioch in that, analogous to Mark 3:16–19 and Acts 6:5, it places the most important person first. Significantly, Barnabas appears first, before Simeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and such a renowned person as Manaen”, who Luke describes as a *σύντροφος* (*syntrophos*, ‘milk brother’) of Herod Antipas; and Kollmann also informs us that the description ‘milk brother’ means that “he was raised alongside the princes in the court of Herod the Great”.⁴⁶ According to Witherington (1996:367), “there were close ties between the Herodian family in Israel and [Antioch], as is shown by the fact that Herod the Great paved [the] main street and placed colonnades along both sides of it”;⁴⁷ and the connection between Manaen (in Antioch) and the Herodian family leads him to speculate that Manaen was perhaps one of the royal family’s retainers in that city.⁴⁸

44 Also, if the primitive church’s *trapeza* in Jerusalem provided a powerful engine for economic growth that helped to achieve the kind of numerical growth described by Luke in Acts 2 to 6, then the establishment of a similar banking operation in Antioch might explain why, under Barnabas’ leadership, “a large company was added to the Lord” in that city (Acts 11:14).

45 The tradition maintains that John-Mark was born in Cyrene, part of modern-day Libya, and that his parents, Aristopulos and Mary, migrated to Palestine shortly after his birth, because of Berber attacks on their town and property. It is therefore possible that Aristopulos, the brother-in-law of Barnabas, may have been a Hellenist merchant and thus wealthy in his own right, and would have therefore provided possible links between the apostle and powerful, commercial networks in Egypt and northern Africa.

46 Foakes Jackson and Lake (1933:142) state that “The title *σύντροφος* is frequent and formal. It is a title of honour given at court to certain youths of the same age as a prince, and retained by adults”.

47 Witherington cites Downey (1961).

48 The RSV describes Manaen as “a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch”.

11.8 Possible Links with Powerful Groups in Alexandria

Jews from Egypt are mentioned in the list of Diaspora groups residing in Jerusalem that reacted to the glossolalia phenomenon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Consequently, I find it plausible that Jews from Alexandria formed part of the “3,000 souls” who were added to the community of believers that day, as well as the various tranches of later converts mentioned in Luke’s text.

According to Read-Heimerdinger (1998:35), the political and trading links between Egypt, Cyprus and Palestine date back to Alexander the Great.⁴⁹ In particular, Homer (1963:39) notes that, after Greece had lost her empire, Rome dominated the Mediterranean world and, as a consequence of Roman policy, “trade shifted to Rhodes, Antioch, Selencia and especially to Alexandria”. Therefore, of significant interest is Edersheim’s comment (1904:98–99) that Alexandria was home to the richest and most influential Jewish community of the entire Diaspora.⁵⁰ He further explains that, “at the time of Philo the number of Jews in Egypt amounted to no less than one million.”⁵¹ The supervision of navigation, both by sea and river, was wholly entrusted to them. In fact, the large export trade, especially in grain – and Egypt was the granary of the world – was entirely in their hands. The provisioning of Italy and of the world was the business of the Jews.”⁵²

Apart from Philo, perhaps the most famous Alexandrian Jews of the period were his relatives, Alexander and Demetrius. Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.159–160) explains that Alexander was “old friends” with the Roman emperor, Claudius; and since there is no evidence that Claudius ever journeyed to Egypt, Evans

49 She states that Cyprus, the nearest island of any size to Palestine, belonged to Egypt from the time of Alexander until it was incorporated into the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century BCE; and Kollmann (2004:4) adds that the inhabitants “had become increasingly Hellenized”. However, Elazar (1986) suggests an even earlier (i.e. post-exile) date for the Jewish connection between Cyprus and Egypt. He writes that, after Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Judea to rebuild their temple, some of the exiles who remained in Babylon subsequently became part of “a somewhat smaller but still significant diaspora in Egypt”, and also “spread into other parts of northern Africa, Cyprus and Asia Minor”.

50 According to Rathbone (2007:315), “In Egypt the Roman period saw a boom in the number of private banks”. Similarly, Homoud (1985:18) asserts that, in the first century CE, banking in Egypt “attained the highest stages of development”, which resulted in the country becoming rich and prosperous.

51 Philo (*In Flaccum* 43, 45) claims that, in 38 CE, “the Jews dwelling in Alexandria and Egypt from the Libyan slope to the borders of Aethiopia do not fall short of a million”. He also states (*In Flaccum* 6, 8) that two out of the five wards in Alexandria were Jewish.

52 Garnsey (1983:118) estimates that, during the late Republican/early Imperial period, Rome needed to import approximately 150,000 tonnes of grain annually – mostly by sea.

(1995:580) argues that Alexander probably spent time in Rome, and further suggests that the financier was a Roman citizen.⁵³ She also states that Alexander became the *epitropos* (procurator) of the extensive land estates in Egypt belonging to the emperor's mother, Antonia Drusus. We know that Alexander and Demetrius were *alabarchs*, a title that includes the function of tax-farmer;⁵⁴ and, according to Gross (1975:22), "There is no question [...] that Philo's relatives, Alexander and Demetrius, holding the high position of *alabarchs* [...] could enter banking on a large scale". Furthermore, Josephus (*War* 5.204–205) draws our attention to a spectacular donation from Alexander, who paid for nine of the large gates of the Temple in Jerusalem to be overlaid with silver and gold. Consequently, Evans (1995:578) writes that "a gift of this magnitude would suggest that Alexander either already had or quickly made important connections with the High Priest in Jerusalem".⁵⁵

It is also interesting that, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.6.3), in around 35 CE, Herod Agrippa sailed to Alexandria and begged Alexander for a loan of 200,000 drachmas.⁵⁶ At the time, Agrippa was in debt to the Imperial treasury in Rome in the amount of 300,000 drachmas of silver; and, according to Evans (1995:579), before he sailed to Alexandria, he was being held at Anthedon, near Gaza on the Mediterranean coast, by Herennius Capito, the procurator of the imperial estate at Jamnia, with orders to collect the full amount owed. In other words, Agrippa was desperate and would therefore have been indebted to Alexander in more ways than one. Furthermore, Josephus (*Antiquities* 19.276–277) informs us that, sometime after 41 CE, Alexander's son Marcus married Agrippa's daughter Berenice. In addition, he mentions (*Antiquities* 20.147) that Demetrius the *alabarch* was at one time married to Mariamne,

53 From the entry on Philo in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: the early years* (Cambridge University Press, 2000:878), we learn that Alexander's father was a Roman citizen (*civis romanus*). For further references to Alexander, see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.2 (100) and 19.5.1 (276).

54 The reference to *alabarch* in *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* explains that, "The trend of modern opinion is to connect [this title] with the Greek term for ink, ἄλαβρα (*alaba*), taking ink in the sense of writing (*scriptura*), which, in those days, was a token for tax (*vectigal*). Such a derivation would imply that the *Alabarch* was a farmer of taxes, certainly from the time of the Ptolemies".

55 The remaining gate ("Gate Beautiful") was made from Corinthian bronze, which Josephus (*War* 5.201) claims far exceeded the others in value. Gross (1975:13) informs us that it "allegedly required twenty men to open or close" and was the gift of a wealthy Egyptian Jew named Nicanor; hence it was also called "the Nicanor gate".

56 Cited in Evans (1995:579) as well as Gross (1975:22). Josephus writes that "Alexander refused to grant this loan to [Agrippa] but he did not deny it to [Agrippa's wife] Cypros because he marvelled at her love of her husband and all her good qualities".

one of Agrippa's other daughters. As a result, this would mean that the family of Alexander was linked to the Herodians through two different marriages – as well as a not inconsiderable debt obligation.⁵⁷

Therefore, apart from a well-attested link with the influential and implicitly wealthy Christian community in Antioch, it is also possible that there was some sort of personal or commercial connection between Barnabas, his family and/or their Cypriot associates and the Jews in North Africa, which may have included the immensely powerful Jewish financiers of Alexandria – who in turn had links to wealthy and powerful groups in Jerusalem, Puteoli and Rome. If true, the various High Priests and Sadducee elite (who did not dare offend powerful benefactors like Alexander, Demetrius and Nicanor), and also Agrippa (who over time became related by marriage to two of the Alexandrian financiers, and also heavily in debt to one of them), would have plenty of reasons for leaving Barnabas alone, and also ensuring he was not around to spoil any plans they were hatching that threatened the leadership of the primitive church. Consequently, that kind of network would have provided Barnabas with a position of economic and political power (in Jerusalem and throughout parts of the Diaspora) that would make him virtually untouchable.

Furthermore, in *Homilies* 1.8–12, Pseudo-Clementine suggests a direct link between the apostle himself and Alexandria, claiming that “Christianity was first preached in the streets of Alexandria by Barnabas”; however, Barnard (1964:145, n. 1), who cites this reference, expresses doubt concerning the historical value of this tradition. From Barnard (1964:146), we also learn that Eusebius, Jerome and Epiphanius associate the family of Barnabas with the Alexandrian church, through his nephew, John-Mark – who, according to Clement of Alexandria, arrived in that city after Peter's death in Rome.⁵⁸ And even though he comments that many scholars have dismissed this as pure legend, Barnard (1964:150) concludes his article with the statement that “the connection between John-Mark and Alexandria, recorded by Eusebius in his ‘Ecclesiastical History’, should be treated with more respect than has been usual in discussions of the origins of Christianity in Egypt”.

57 However, even if there was no familial link between the two *alabarchs*, Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.147) alludes to Demetrius' position of power and influence by describing him as “a Jew of prominent birth and great wealth”.

58 Mentioned in Morton Smith (1973:446–448). According to the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, the tradition representing Mark as the founder of the Church of Alexandria is attested by Eusebius (*Church History* 11, xvi, xxiv), by Jerome (*De Vir. Illust.*, viii), by the *Apostolic Constitutions* (vii, xlvi), by Epiphanius (*Hær.*, li, 6) and by many later authorities. This information is available online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09672c.htm>; accessed on July 14th 2010.

Pearson (1986:209–210) speculates that “some of the Hellenists hounded out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) went to Alexandria; in any case, traffic between Jerusalem and Alexandria was extensive at that time”. Interestingly, Sangrador (1994; cited in a review by Bingham, 1996:567) agrees that the first Christians to evangelise Alexandria were Hellenist missionaries. However, he suggests that this group made their journey to the city at a later date: i.e. after Paul’s dispute with Mark and Barnabas. He claims that, since Acts shows how Hellenist Christians evangelized many of the regions of the eastern and southern Mediterranean, it would be natural to see these *Hellēnistae* also sailing to Alexandria (even though not specifically recorded by Luke). And, according to Bingham, Sangrador shows an ancient, regular relationship between Alexandria, Cyprus and Cyrene. This is confirmed by Collins (1983:10, 20), who informs us that “The lively contacts between Judea and Egypt in the Ptolemaic period, and the ease with which prominent Jews engaged in Hellenistic commerce and politics, are illustrated by the Zeno papyri (*Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* 1:115–146) and the tales of the Tobiads in Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.4.1–11 [154–234])”. Thus, from these sources, we find sufficient evidence to establish the possibility of connections between leaders of the Jewish community in Alexandria,⁵⁹ the most important financial and trading centre in the Roman empire, outside of Italy, and members of the primitive church community in Jerusalem; in particular, the Hellenist merchants and financiers – which would have included Barnabas, one of their leaders.

This could further help to explain the possible extent and power of this particular apostle’s network; and, if true, these connections would have protected him (and his family) during periods of persecution, and also deterred even the most powerful groups in Jerusalem and elsewhere from crossing swords with him. For instance, in Lystra, when the pagans saw the miracle of the cripple walking, they shouted that “the gods have come down to us in human form” (Acts 14:11–12). But it was Barnabas to whom they gave the title of “Zeus” who, according to Greek mythology, was the king of the gods and ruler of Mount Olympus;⁶⁰ while Paul was given the title of “Hermes”, a messenger

59 Another Coptic tradition claims that Theophilus, who Luke addresses in the introductory verses of both the Gospel of Luke (1:3) and Acts (1:1), was a Jew from Alexandria; also, that Luke studied medicine at the School of Alexandria, and that he and Theophilus may have met during this time. However, neither claim can be substantiated. Nonetheless, based on his study of the *Kerygma Petri*, Jakab (2001) concludes that the earliest Christians in Alexandria came from an educated class of people.

60 The ASV, DARBY, DRA, GNV, KJV, KNOX, NLV, WEB and WYC use “Jupiter”, the equivalent leader of the gods in Roman mythology. Dods writes (1905:341) that “This belief came more readily to the mind of the inhabitants of Lystra, owing to the tradition that Jupiter

from the gods to humans. Kollmann (2004:36) argues that “The identification of Barnabas with Zeus and Paul with Hermes, while attributable to Barnabas’ greater age, on the one hand, and Paul’s perhaps greater eloquence, on the other (*cf.* 2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:16), also expresses a hierarchical relationship”. To support this assertion, he mentions that, at this point in the Acts narrative (Acts 14:14), Luke changes the order of names back to “the apostles Barnabas and Paul”.

Of particular interest is the fact that, in Lystra, when Paul got stoned (Acts 14:19–20), Barnabas did not. So, once again, circumstances and other factors conspired to promote Barnabas and also keep him from harm. We are told that Paul’s assailants were Lycaonians, stirred up by Jews from Antioch and Iconium; however, it is not clear in the text as to whether the stoning was carried out by the Jewish visitors, the locals in Lystra, or a combination of both.⁶¹ Therefore, we are presented with a choice of two scenarios in which either the Lycaonians were so affected by Barnabas’ physical resemblance to their god, as Dods suggests, they could not bring themselves to do him harm; or else the Jews from Antioch and Iconium had reason to fear potential retaliation from the older apostle’s powerful connections in Jerusalem, Antioch and elsewhere throughout the Diaspora; and so directed their attack and murderous efforts exclusively in Paul’s direction.⁶²

11.9 Two Priest-Bankers: Joseph-Barnabas and Joseph, the Patriarch

Finally, it would be interesting to explore the possibility of some kind of association (at least in the minds of the apostles and/or Luke) between the Joseph of this study and his namesake, the patriarch.

On the one hand, we have Joseph, who is also known as ‘Barnabas’ (i.e. Son of Encouragement, etc.), the ‘Just’ or ‘Righteous One’, who was also a Levite and Hellenist-capitalist; and on the other hand, we have the patriarch Joseph,

[or Zeus] had once before visited their city in human form. That Barnabas could possibly be identified with [this pagan god], with whose statue they were familiar, is a tribute to his appearance”. Whether Zeus or Jupiter, the question arises as to why any group of people would give Barnabas such a lofty title (i.e. the leader of the gods) unless, of course, he looked, talked and behaved like the leader in that particular situation.

61 Lüdemann (1989:164) writes that “The question whether Jews or Gentiles carried out the punishment of stoning on Paul is left open”.

62 Saul-Paul’s conversion to the nascent sect of Jesus-Believers (Acts *qff.*) would have been seen by the ruling elite of Jerusalem as an act of betrayal, and could have left him bereft of powerful allies and protectors; not so Barnabas, thanks to his status as a Levite, and also his pre-existing and powerful networks.

also known as the ‘Righteous’ (קִיָּץ, *tsaddîq*) or ‘Virtuous,’ and Israel’s prototypical and premier priest-banker. To suggest another link, Read-Heimerdinger (1998:52) cites a rabbinic Midrash commenting on Genesis 50:21, in which the patriarch Joseph “spoke mild words to the hearts of the tribal fathers [his brothers and fellow Patriarchs] and therefore *comforted* them” (emphasis added); and also writes that “Mention is made of the fact in Gen. 50:15–21 where in the English translation (RSV) it is said that ‘[Joseph] reassured them and comforted them’ (50:21). The verb in the LXX text is precisely *παρεκάλει*. Thus, the qualities of comforter and righteousness are two of the outstanding qualities attributed to the person of Joseph in Jewish tradition”.

She further asserts that “The appropriateness of the name ‘Barnabas’ as Luke translates it, in association with the other name ‘the Just or the Righteous One,’ is evidence that Barnabas is the correct reading of Acts 1:23. That they should be recorded by Luke as being attributed to Joseph, the disciple of Jesus, points to an intentional assimilation between Barnabas and the historical figure of Joseph”.⁶³ As we see, Read-Heimerdinger has based her opinion of Luke’s “intentional assimilation” on a combination of scripture and Jewish historical-literary sources, but we should also consider the possible economic parallels: i.e. that both men performed the role of priest-banker. After separating from Paul, Barnabas disappears from the Acts narrative and, according to the pseudepigraphic *Acts of Barnabas* by John Mark and the *Laudatio* of Alexander Monarchus,⁶⁴ Barnabas and John-Mark conducted their mission throughout Cyprus before Barnabas was supposedly martyred in Salamis in around 55 CE.⁶⁵ In the *Acts of Barnabas* it is alleged that he was killed by local Jews who were encouraged by his old adversary, Elymas (cf. Acts 13:8–9); whereas, in the *Laudatio*, it is claimed that his murderers are Jews who had come to Salamis from Syria.⁶⁶

In the conclusion to his instructive monograph, Kollmann (2004:63) writes of Barnabas that “His enduring significance consists in the fact that he, *like no other*, appears in a leading role in all the prominent events of early Christianity”.

63 Read-Heimerdinger (1998:52–53) supports her “intentional assimilation” hypothesis with a comparison between Luke’s description of Joseph-Barnabas in Acts 11:24 (“He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit”, ἦν ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ πλήρης πνεύματος) and Simeon’s description of his brother, Joseph, in the *Testament of Simeon* 4:4 (“Joseph was a good man, and had the spirit of God within him”, ἦν ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἔχων πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐν ἑαυτῷ), which she claims is “strikingly similar”.

64 According to Kollmann (2004:47), in these two documents, the “respective accounts of the second Cyprus mission and the death of Barnabas concur in outline”.

65 The traditional anniversary of the apostle’s death is June 11th.

66 See *Acts of Barnabas* 23 and Alexander Monarchus, *Laudatio* 26.479–29.549.

Obviously, this statement alone would settle the true status of Joseph-Barnabas within the leadership of the primitive church. However, if we also consider the behind-the-scenes activity of this Hellenist-capitalist and power-broker, and his possible influence in the wider economic and political circles of the Jewish Diaspora in the first century CE, his importance can indeed be said to correlate in many ways to that of Joseph, the patriarch: i.e. a priest-banker who used his elevated position, both economically and politically, to help open doors and smooth the way for the people of Yahweh and His work on earth during a crucial period of momentous change and historic developments.

The Relationship between Spiritual and Economic Transformation

12.1 Problems and Controversy

Normally, any exegetical foray into the books of the Hebrew prophets is fraught with a certain amount of problems and controversy; in particular, questions of authorship and authenticity.

For example, because the OT blessing formula appears in numerous books, either on its own or as an integral component of the salvation-restoration oracle, some scholars have cited the regular and frequent occurrence of this formula (along with certain similarities in language) to argue that it should be attributed to groups such as the Deuteronomist editors, rather than to the individual prophets from whom the various books derive their names. Hence, Zimmerli (1983:28), for instance, asserts that it was “a later hand” who added the blessing formula to the original text of Ezekiel 36:11; however, I would suggest that these arcane problems concerning the text have little bearing on the present investigation. After all, in the first century CE, the salvation-restoration oracles in general and the blessing formula in particular would have been deeply embedded within the prophetic traditions of Judaism, and also within the collective psyche of the Jewish people: i.e. an example of what we would call “received knowledge”, which is usually handled with minimal critical reflection by those involved.

Consequently, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter’s audience would have intellectually processed and/or emotionally responded to his arguments on the basis of what they *believed* to be true. Therefore, what they believed assumes far greater importance in our examination of the possible relationship between spiritual and economic transformation than what may or may not have been textually or historically authentic – which I argue remains relevant in the modern era, especially now that faith-based organisations (FBOs) are becoming key actors on the global economic stage.

12.2 The OT Spiritual-Economic Cycle: An Overview

As mentioned previously, the phrase “grain, oil and new wine” and its individual elements form a literary motif used throughout Hebrew scripture to depict

episodes of ancient agrarian economic activity, both actual and promised, in either a positive or negative sense: i.e. good harvests and bad.¹ On that basis, Joel 1 and 2 (for example) may be interpreted as depicting the four phases of a spiritual cycle that has economic consequences: (1) backsliding causes Yahweh to progressively remove His blessing, thus creating (economic) recession; (2) outright disobedience and sin results in a total removal of that blessing, resulting in depression; (3) true, heart-felt repentance causes Yahweh to reinstate His blessing, which kick-starts the process of recovery; and (4) increasing levels of obedience lead ultimately to the restoration of full blessing, which gives rise to prosperity,² if not “a surplus of prosperity” (Deuteronomy 28:11, AMPC).

The opening chapter of Joel depicts the lowest point of the spiritual-economic cycle and, as such, paints a dismal picture of agro-economic desolation. There is no blessing or prosperity, and what little there might have been by way of harvests has been eaten away by different kinds of destructive “locusts”, a word used both literally and metaphorically: e.g. to depict surrounding war-like, predatory nations. For instance, Barton (2001:44) explains that, “In favor of a military interpretation, it may be noted that the locusts are described as a ‘nation’ (*gôy*) in [Joel] 1:6”. He also reminds us (2001:43) that this imagery occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in this context: e.g. in Judges 6:5, the Midianites and Amalekites used to come up against Israel “as thick as locusts” (*cf.* also 7:12); and Jeremiah 51:14 contains the threat that Yahweh will fill Babylon “with troops like a swarm of locusts”. This agro-economic calamity, as we are told by the prophet, left the people of Yahweh downcast.

The field is laid waste; the ground mourns, for the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails [i.e. there is no harvest and ensuing prosperity] [...] so that joy has withered and fled away from the sons of men.

Joel 1:10, 12

From the text, we understand that “the sons of men” lost Yahweh’s blessing because of their rebellion and disobedience. So the prophet calls them to

1 See, for example, Deuteronomy 7:13; 28:51; 33:28; 2 Chronicles 32:28; Nehemiah 5:11; Isaiah 36:17; 62:8; Jeremiah 31:12; Hosea 2:8–9, 22; 7:14; Joel 1:10; 2:19; 2:24; Haggai 1:11; Zechariah 9:17. The motif is also used to depict the elements associated with the ritual/offering of the tithe or first fruits of the harvest. See Numbers 18:12; Deuteronomy 11:14; 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:5; Nehemiah 10:37, 39; 13:5.

2 Quoting Leviticus 26:3–13, Agrell (1976:20) explains that, if the Israelites lived according to the conditions laid down in the Mosaic-Sinai covenant, “they will receive rain, crops, fruit, bread, and peace [*shalown*] in their land: i.e. they will be richly provided for and protected”.

repent – a true repentance and not some superficial ritual: “Rend your hearts and not your garments and return to the Lord, your God” (Joel 2:13). Then, if and when His people did repent, Yahweh promised to remove their oppression and restore their prosperity – in a detailed passage (2:19–27) that contains the promise to restore the years that the cankerworm and locusts have eaten away, so that “you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and shall praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you” (2:26).

Finally, after all this, comes the promise in Joel 2:28 of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Peter referred to on the Day of Pentecost: “And afterwards, I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams”, etc. In other words, *after* all this “grain, oil and new wine” has been poured out, *then* the Holy Spirit will be poured out. Thus, economic restoration/transformation is supposed to precede or at least coincide with spiritual transformation. Apparently, as far as Joel is concerned, the existing economic crisis needed to be resolved *before* the people could derive proper benefit from the spiritual component of the OT salvation-restoration oracle. And a possible reason for this is implicit in Christ’s explanation of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:22 and Mark 4:19); namely, that unless we resolve “the cares of this world”, they will “choke and suffocate the Word [of God, so that it] yields no fruit”. In a similar vein, in 2005 I was informed by senior executives of Opportunity International Australia that a key objective of their microfinance programme is to help pave the way for evangelism, because “an empty stomach creates a closed mind” (to the gospel). Likewise, an old African saying, cited by Agbetse (2007:65), states that “a famished stomach has no ears”.

An earlier example of the spiritual-economic transformation cycle can be found in the Book of Jeremiah, as part of the promised new covenant: “Behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31). The cycle is part of the concluding section of the oracle known as the “Book of Consolation”, which commences in Chapter 30. The oracle promises that the people would be released from their oppression (which again occurred because of their turning away from Yahweh) and that they would be rebuilt as a nation under this new covenant – both spiritually *and* economically:

They shall come together and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and shall flow together and be radiant with joy over the goodness of the Lord, for the corn, for the new wine, for the oil, and for the young of the flock and

the herd. And their life shall be like a garden and they shall not sorrow or languish any more at all.

Jeremiah 31:12

Therefore, since the advent of the new covenant occurred with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, which subsequently led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, by implication, we should expect to see evidence of both components of the salvation-restoration oracle fulfilled in the period immediately following Pentecost.

In addition, a similar cycle of events can be found in the Book of Ezekiel. In chapter 36, verses 8 through 11 contain a promise to restore prosperity not just at the level experienced previously, but on an even greater scale: “And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited according to your former estate, *and I will do better for you than at your beginnings*” (Ezekiel 36:11, emphasis added). Then a few verses later, Yahweh makes another promise; this time concerning spiritual transformation: “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (36:26–27). Consequently, I would argue that the above passages provide sufficient evidence to suggest that, according to OT scripture, Yahweh has promised that the outpouring of economic prosperity will coincide with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: i.e. economic restoration will accompany spiritual transformation.³

12.3 The Baal-Yahweh Polemic: A Battle for Men’s Hearts through Their Stomachs

Any comprehensive examination of the OT salvation-restoration oracle and its constituent “grain, oil and new wine” motif requires that we first understand the significance and psychological potency of the provision and protection components within the worship of nature-gods in Israel and Judah. This in turn necessitates an exploration of the Baal-Yahweh polemic, which is both the

3 Barton (2001:94) also draws our attention to the association between the Holy Spirit and “renewed fruitfulness” in Isaiah 32:15: “Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is valued as a forest”.

source of and reason behind most of the scriptural references to this particular combination of oracle and motif.

Woods (1994:14 and 2002:3) explains that the name Baal appears 76 times in the Old Testament: 18 times in the singular and 58 times in the plural – more often than any other pagan deity.⁴ From his heavenly home, Ba'al Hadad was supposed to rule over all aspects of water and storm, including lightning, rain, thunder, dew and clouds. The worship of Baal was essentially a fertility cult, which functioned to bring fertility to an area affected by an arid climate, and also to the many herds of animals that were a source of food, clothing and wealth. Obviously, the general idea of fertility encompasses human fertility and, consequently, human sexuality became an integral part of Baal-worship. However, there is enough evidence to indicate that devotees of this nature-god were motivated primarily by agro-economic factors: the people needed rain for their crops and herds, and Baal and his family were thought to control all aspects of the weather,⁵ which obviously includes the supply of rain. As Woods writes (1994:1):

Man's physiological needs are his most fundamental concerns. Among these needs, water is of paramount importance. The agrarian peoples of the ancient Middle East were acutely aware of the most basic equation: 'water = life'. The relatively arid climate with its seasonal rainfalls magnified the need for this sustaining element into a daily concern. In his attempt to explain the uncertainty, he developed gods to serve as intercessory, intermediary figures between him and nature. The importance of 'nature' gods in religious beliefs was shaped significantly by man's dependence upon water and his attempt to influence its supply.

The promise of economic prosperity is an extremely powerful, motivational force; surpassed only in emotive strength by the feelings of desperation experienced when confronted by its antithesis: i.e. economic disaster, whether present or potential.⁶ The interplay of these opposing psychological forces often provided the motivation behind the question of loyalty and obedience to a

4 Interestingly, 20 out of the 76 mentions of "Baal" occur in three OT books that also contain the salvation-restoration oracle: Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. Furthermore, in those same books, the word "idol" appears 79 times; and in Jeremiah alone, the term "other gods" appears 20 times, and "false gods" 5 times.

5 For example, the Ugaritic literature shows that one of Baal's three daughters is called *Tly*, the goddess of the morning dew.

6 Today, this can be seen in the emotive forces arising from either the abundance or lack of money. As Ferguson (2008:13) explains, "we are learning from a growing volume of research

particular deity for many ancient peoples, including the people of Israel and Judah. And the frequent occurrence of the Baal-Yahweh polemic in scripture not only testifies to the significance of the polemic itself, it also highlights the depth and strength of the economically-driven, psychological forces present in the hearts and minds of the people during the period under review. However, it is not my intention to deal with this polemic in any great depth, but merely to discuss certain aspects that show how important the twin promises of divine provision and protection were to the people of Israel and Judah.

The book of Hosea, one of the oldest of the prophetic books to use the “grain, oil and new wine” motif, provides a helpful insight into the problem at the heart of the polemic, and so affords us a good place to start.

For [Israel] has not noticed, understood, or realized that it was I [the Lord God] Who gave her the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and Who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal and made into his image.

Hosea 2:8

Apparently, a century later, the problem as to which god the people believed they should be indebted to for their economic welfare still existed, as shown by the fact that Jeremiah protested likewise that the people of Judah “did not say to themselves, Let us reverence Yahweh our God, Who gives us rain, The autumn rain and the spring rain in season” (Jeremiah 5:24). The prophet goes on to remind the people that it is Yahweh who secures “the weeks appointed for harvest”, and Thompson (1981:249) comments that the ritual in which the priest presented the first sheaf of the harvest at Passover (Leviticus 23:10), and which was repeated seven weeks later at the Feast of Harvests as an offering of grain from the new crop (Leviticus 23:17), was intended to “acknowledge the activity of Yahweh in making the maturing of the crop possible [...] for it was He who gave Israel her grain”.

Skinner (1963:59) explains that, because “the desert faith of Israel made no express provision for the devotional exercises suitable to the needs of an agricultural community”, by the time of Jeremiah, the popular religion in Israel and Judah had become somewhat schizophrenic: “Yahweh was recognised as the God of the nation, whose presence was realised in times of great national enthusiasm; but He was not at first apprehended as the God of the land, and the dispenser of the good gifts of corn and wine and oil”. Oldenburg (1969:176)

in the field of behavioural finance [that] money amplifies our tendency to overreact, to swing from exuberance when things are going well to deep depression when they go wrong”.

confirms this with a similar comment: “To the Israelites, moreover, the specific fertility god Ba’al Hadad rather than Yahweh, whom they had met in the desert, may have seemed a better fit to give them success in farming like the Canaanites”. Therefore, despite a well-established tradition of Yahweh’s awesome exhibitions of military-style power – including the defeat of various nations who worshipped Baal – in the matter of provision, it was the Baals and not Yahweh to whom the Israelites usually turned in worship and with votive offerings when they wanted to ensure the occurrence or plead for the restoration of whatever natural elements were necessary to secure good harvests.

Perhaps the best-known episode within this polemic is the confrontation between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal, which took place on Mount Carmel. According to Woods (1994:97), the account in 1 Kings is considered to be the climax of the centuries-long battle between Yahweh and Baalism; not just in the Book of Kings, but in the entire Hebrew Bible. Ahab, King of Judah (873–852 BCE), had taken Jezebel to be his wife and Queen. Jezebel was the daughter of the Phoenician King, Ethba’al, and Ahab erected an altar for Baal in Samaria and worshipped him and also made a sacred post for the goddess Asherah. In fact, Ahab is said to have angered Yahweh more than any of the kings of Israel who ruled before him (1 Kings 16:29–33), and the worship of Baal reached its peak during his reign. So, having given His people ample warning regarding the consequences of following after other gods, the time had come for Yahweh – through the prophet Elijah – to invoke the punishment/curse clauses of the covenant;⁷ in particular, the threat of drought: i.e. the removal/absence of “life-giving” rain.

As Yahweh lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain these years, but according to my word.

1 Kings 17:1

However, the ensuing drought was just Yahweh’s way of getting His people’s attention. The pivotal demonstration of power came later, and commenced with a challenge from Elijah: “If Yahweh is God, then follow Him; and if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). Since the people did not answer the prophet, their guilty silence suggests that the worship of Baal had permeated their lives to such an extent, it needed to be confronted in a decisive manner; and the venue chosen for the confrontation is of special interest. According to Woods (2002:10–11), Mount Carmel was located directly on the border of Israel and Phoenicia, the kingdom ruled by Ethba’al; and the Hebrew כַּרְמֶל (*karmel*)

⁷ Deuteronomy 28:23–24.

means 'garden land' and 'fruitful place', thus implying agricultural fertility and ensuing prosperity. Furthermore, Aharoni (1979:341) asserts that, according to an Assyrian inscription dated 841 BCE, at the time of this event, Mount Carmel was referred to by the Canaanites as Mount *Ba'li-ra'si*. Oldenburg (1969:80) agrees, and suggests that the source of this epithet comes from the annals of the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser III. So here again the polemic is implicit in that Elijah appears to have chosen to stage this demonstration of Yahweh's superiority over Baal in a location over which the Baals supposedly held sway.

But why is this episode considered to be the climax of the centuries-long battle between Yahweh and Baalism? According to Oldenburg (1969:1), no other god is depicted in the OT as being "more wicked, immoral and abominable than the storm god, Ba'al Hadad". However, he implies that an immense amount of literary effort was put behind the Baal-Yahweh polemic not so much because of the actual character of the Baal cult, but because the worship of Ba'al Hadad posed a greater threat to Yahwism than that of any other god, which prompts us to examine possible reasons as to why this was so. Oldenburg (1969:176) further explains that:

When the Israelites came into Canaan, they found everywhere, from north to south, the different and independent local cults of Ba'al Hadad established on the high places of the land [...] In their new surroundings, the Israelites had to adjust themselves to an entirely new way of living; from being desert nomads they became sedentary agriculturists. From the native population of Canaan the Israelites learned the best methods of agriculture suited for that mountainous terrain. But, together with these new methods, they learned the rituals of the Ba'al cult as well, which were considered an integral part of making the soil fertile.

However, a marked change occurred during the reign of the House of Omri. At that point, this cult of the hills and fields metamorphosed into a much more powerful form. Apart from the fact that it became highly organised – with a central temple and 450-strong priesthood – Baal-worship also gained an added dimension of influence from the association with political and economic power, as Oldenburg remarks (1969:177):

In the ninth century BC Tyre became exceedingly strong, being the center of the vast Phoenician colonial empire. Consequently the cult of its national god, Melqarth, i.e. Hadad, spread wherever the commercial influence of Tyre reached, and the acceptance of this cult became a sign of political alliance with Tyre. The northern kingdom of Israel, being

so close geographically and economically to Tyre, could hardly remain unaffected.⁸

This alliance with the wealthiest and most powerful mercantile nation of the day obviously benefited the economy of Israel, and the reign of Omri established a time of great prosperity. According to Whitley (1952:139), Israel continued to flourish under his son, Ahab: “Jericho which had lain desolate for some four centuries was now rebuilt (1 Kings 16:34); other cities were founded, and the palace in Samaria was further enlarged and ornamented (1 Kings 22:28)”.⁹

Whitley (1952:150) also suggests that the strength of the literary tirade against Ahab, as penned by the Deuteronomist editors, was inspired “not only because he set up Baal worship in Samaria, but because of his constant association with foreign powers”. By moving from the countryside to the palace, the cult also moved into a higher gear in terms of its impact and influence on the general populace. Understandably, the public display of wealth, military power and other benefits of a powerful economic/political alliance – all of which were associated with the cult of Baal that, through Jezebel, had gained the status of state religion – would have looked decidedly more attractive to the people of Israel than the distant promises of their ancient desert covenant with Yahweh, who was remembered fondly perhaps for engineering long-past victories over the nation’s enemies, but not especially for the fulfilment of His promise of provision. Interestingly, the OT text suggests that the choice of Canaan as the Promised Land was partially responsible for creating the problem that gave rise to the polemic.

For over 400 years, the Israelites had dwelt in Egypt, a land that derived its fertility from the River Nile, which could be counted on to flood its banks at around the same time each season, to provide water and silt over the adjacent flood plain. Basic but highly effective methods of irrigation also added to the efficiency and ease with which farmers in Egypt could raise their crops and feed their animals. However, in Canaan, a land reputedly “flowing with milk and honey”, the provision of life-giving water could not be taken for granted.¹⁰ Consequently, in this new land, where the water supply was

8 Oldenburg (1969:177) also explains that Phoenician Baalism was introduced into the southern kingdom of Judah through the political marriage of the Judean vassal king, Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, to Athaliah, the daughter of Omri, who had grown up in the court of Ahab and Jezebel. According to Armstrong (1997:63), Athaliah built a temple for Baal in Jerusalem that “was served by the Sidonian priest, Mattan”.

9 For the splendour of the palace and buildings in Samaria in Ahab’s time, see Crowfoot and Crowfoot (1938:1–6).

10 See Deuteronomy 11:10–27.

somewhat unpredictable, and where storms, droughts and floods created a fragile environment for agriculture, the people's dependence on "divine" provision meant that the widespread worship of nature-gods was inevitable. The only question was: which one? Thus, according to scripture, began a constant battle for the hearts and minds of the people of Israel and Judah based on the twin promises of divine protection and provision. The issue of which deity was in the ascendant appeared to depend on whatever human need was greater at the time.

As mentioned above, if there was a pressing need for protection against some foreign military power, then Yahweh was called upon; although, that might depend on how vulnerable the people felt, since there were times when their hubris led them not to cry out to Him. On the other hand, the seemingly unshakable existence of Baal-worship throughout the centuries suggests the obvious: namely, that the need for good harvests was far more prevalent and pressing than the need for success in battle. From this, we can see clearly how basic human needs can often determine religious choices and/or loyalty.

12.4 The Spiritual-Economic Cycle in Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Even though there is a century between them, Jeremiah shares with Joel the classic scenario in which the prophet seizes opportunistically on a contemporary, natural calamity to explain that the nation's economic woes are evidence of corporate sin and rebellion against Yahweh; and that they, as a nation, have broken the conditions of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant.¹¹ For Joel, a plague of locusts and drought provided the prophet with a reason to be heard. Likewise, for Jeremiah, the "talking point", as Thompson (1981:249) calls it, came from a period of drought: a natural calamity that the prophet exploited to remind the people that their problems were of their own making. By breaking their covenant with Yahweh, there was no longer any obligation on His part to supply the material blessings promised within that covenant. As Jeremiah explained to the people, "Your iniquities have turned these blessings away and your sins have kept good [harvests] from you" (Jeremiah 5:25).

11 Thompson (1981:59) informs us that, in the Book of Jeremiah, "The word 'covenant' (*berît*) occurs some twenty-three times, most of these in reference to Yahweh's covenant with His people, whether the Mosaic Sinai Covenant or the New Covenant". See Jeremiah 11:2, 3, 9-10; 14:21; 22:9; 31:31-33; 32:40; 33:20-21; and 50:5. In his commentary on Jeremiah 2:20, he explains (1981:177) that "Israel had cast off all restraints that bound her to Yahweh her sovereign Lord, declaring, 'I will not serve'. The verb '*abad*, 'serve', *be a slave*', is also used to describe the action of one who is a vassal. The context thus points to the covenant".

In the Book of Jeremiah, we find early appearances of elements of the different phases of the OT salvation-restoration oracle: e.g. identification of sin with economic woes (2:19–20; 3:2–3; 5:19) → threat of punishment (2:9) → call for repentance (3:22; 4:1) → promise of economic and/or political restoration (3:16; 4:1).¹² However, since this chapter is concerned primarily with the link between the old and new covenants, it is the promise of the new covenant in that book that concerns us most. The relevant scriptures in Jeremiah, known as “The Book of Consolation”, commence in chapter 30; and Thompson (1981:553–554) explains that the phrase שְׁבוּת שׁוֹב (*šûb šəbûṭ*; literally ‘turn the turning’) occurs frequently in the ,¹³ and is to be viewed in Jeremiah 30:3 either as a reversal of the fortunes of the people of Yahweh, or a restoration of their fortunes.¹⁴ Similarly, when Bracke (1985:244; cited in Westermann, 1991:258) examined the contexts in which the expression *šûb šəbûṭ* occurs, he concluded that, amongst other things, it was “a technical term indicating a restoration to an earlier time of well being”.

Specific reference to the central elements of the new covenant commences in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah, which contains the only reference to the new covenant in the entire OT. Since some features of the old and new covenants remain essentially the same, it is the differences that attract our attention here.¹⁵ In particular, there is an implicit recognition that the old covenant contained a major flaw, inasmuch as one side, the people, seemed morally and spiritually incapable of meeting their obligations on a consistent and meaningful basis. Therefore, Yahweh, the significantly more powerful party and thus the only one in a position to negotiate or implement any substantive changes, appears to have felt compelled to provide a way in which things could improve in this regard – by changing the way in which the covenant and covenant relationship is processed by the people: i.e. a shift from external ritual and religious practices to a more internalised form of religion.

12 In his commentary on Jeremiah 3:16, Thompson (1981:202) writes: “The picture of the days of restoration is now enlarged. There will be material prosperity (when you have multiplied and become fruitful in the land) and true religion (they will no longer say ‘The Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh’)”.

13 For example, Deuteronomy 30:3; Job 42:10; Psalms 14:7, 53:6, 85:1, 126:4; Jeremiah 29:14; 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26; 48:47; 49:6, 39; Lamentations 2:14; Ezekiel 16:53; 29:14; 39:25; Hosea 6:11; Joel 3:1; Amos 9:14; Zephaniah 2:7 and 3:20.

14 The NASB, NIV and AMPC generally translate *šəbûṭ* as ‘fortunes’; whereas, the KJV and DRA use the less helpful ‘captivity’; also, according to Gesenius’ Lexicon, in Job 42:10, אֵיבָה שְׁבוּתָהּ שׁוֹב (Yahōvā *šûb šəbûṭ* ‘*hyôb*) is rendered “Jehovah restored Job to his *prosperity*” (emphasis added).

15 I find Skinner (1963:328–329) helpful with his detailed articulation of the differences.

This process of internalisation was intended to result in the people *knowing* Yahweh, as opposed to simply *knowing about* Him. In fact, Carroll (1981:581) informs us that “The verb [יָדָע, *yāda*, ‘to know’, in Jeremiah 31:34] probably carries its most profound connotation, the intimate personal knowledge which arises between two persons who are committed wholly to one another in a relationship that touches mind, emotion and will”. Nevertheless, all this internalisation and emphasis on “the heart” in the new covenant did not change anything concerning the externalities of economic blessing/prosperity within the existing contract between Yahweh and His people. Therefore, the promise of an outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” remains an integral component of both old and new covenants.

The Book of Ezekiel, which is better known for its focus on cultic matters, also contains the blessing formula, and even intensifies its appeal with a promise (in Ezekiel 36:11) that Israel and Judah will together enjoy future economic and political conditions that would surpass those experienced in the early days of the nation, when they entered and possessed the promised land of Canaan. As mentioned earlier, Zimmerli (1983:230) asserts that “a later hand has added the blessing formula [to promise] an increase of good beyond what it once was”. Nonetheless, he subsequently alludes to the promise of concurrent economic and spiritual regeneration (1983:249) with his statement that, in Ezekiel 36:29–30, “a new beginning is made describing the changes in the external life of the country, changes which go hand in hand with the inner renewal”. In terms of this study, our interest in the Book of Ezekiel is confined to a small section that covers the sin-punishment/repentance-blessing cycle, and in doing so looks forward to the new covenant without naming it as such.

The Ezekiel tradition deals with the time of the Babylonian exile, and the prophet is proclaiming the “word of Yahweh” from his base by the River Cheba (Ezekiel 1:1). In keeping with the OT salvation-restoration model, first comes the explanation of why the people of Yahweh lost His promised protection and provision (36:17–19):

Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by [going] their [own] way and by their [idolatrous] doings. Their conduct before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman during her [physical] impurity.

So I poured out My wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land and for their idols with which they had defiled it.

And I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries; according to their conduct and their [idolatrous] deeds I judged and punished them.

Interestingly, this short section of the Ezekiel tradition does not contain a classic call to repentance in the hope of enticing Yahweh to respond with some sort of positive, remedial action. Instead, Yahweh is seen as changing tack proactively for the sake of His name.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Ezekiel 36:25 contains a reference to purification that points towards the requirement for baptism stipulated by Peter in Acts 2:38 as the outward expression of inner repentance: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness”. Zimmerli (1983:248) explains that the verb זָרַק (*zāraq*, ‘to sprinkle’) is used elsewhere in the OT in connection with the sprinkling of blood.¹⁷ Therefore, he argues that this is a reference to the cultic purification ritual, substituting water for blood. Also, we should bear in mind Allen’s assertion (1976:104), mentioned previously, that “the appeal for repentance in Acts 2:38 has an obvious affinity with Joel’s call in Joel 2:12f.; the sacrament of baptism replacing the mourning [i.e. lamentation] rites”.

Consequently, in Ezekiel’s reference to cleansing with water, we have an allusion to baptism/purification and thus repentance, which is stipulated in Joel and implied in Acts as the trigger for both inward/spiritual *and* outward/economic regeneration. Therefore, one verse later (36:26–30), in accord with the OT salvation-restoration model, we find the actual promise of a simultaneous occurrence of spiritual *and* economic regeneration/restoration:

A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall heed My ordinances and do them.

And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

I will also save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will call forth the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine on you.

And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that you may no more suffer the reproach and disgrace of famine among the nations.

16 See Ezekiel 36:21–23.

17 See, for example, Exodus 24:6 and Leviticus 1:5, 11. Numbers 19:9–22 refers to a similar act of cleansing with water but changes the phrase to ‘running water’ (19:17), even though it uses the verb ‘to sprinkle’.

Zimmerli (1982:248) advises that, in the OT, the word “spirit” always suggests “a power which gives a man strength to do new things (1 Samuel 10:6f.)¹⁸ [...] Jeremiah 31:31ff. had referred to putting the law in the human heart. Ezekiel 36:27 speaks of putting the spirit there and in this way goes beyond Jeremiah 31 and allows Yahweh to participate directly in man’s new obedience”. As mentioned previously, the advent of the new covenant occurred with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, which subsequently led to the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, commencing at Pentecost. Thus, in Ezekiel, we find further evidence to support the argument that, in scripture, the promise of an outpouring of material prosperity by Yahweh (usually depicted by the literary motif, “grain, oil and new wine”) either precedes or at least coincides with the promise of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit – which, when added to the above-mentioned evidence from Joel and Jeremiah, implies that we should expect to see both types of “outpourings” occur on or around the Day of Pentecost.

12.5 Is There a Correlation between Moral and Economic Conditions?

Your iniquities have turned these blessings away, and your sins have kept good [harvests] from you.

Jeremiah 5:25

This statement from the Book of Jeremiah, which is attributed to Yahweh, implies that there was a correlation between “sin” (in particular, spiritual rebellion and disobedience) and the economic woes being experienced by Judah at the time. However, in order to establish this idea as more than just religious propaganda or pious rhetoric, we need to show that secular economic research findings support at least some of the underlying principles or assumptions.

Unfortunately, empirical evidence in this area is not easy to come across, since orthodox economists tend to ignore so-called “soft” (i.e. socio-psychological) factors – which include many facets of human behaviour, apart from those involving questions of sin or morality – when analysing economic activity or conditions. Instead, like their seventeenth-century forebears, they prefer to concentrate on hard data: the measurable sources of economic growth or slowdown in a given country or region, such as changes in resources and/or other factors that create changes in economic output (e.g. changes in investment, capital accumulation, labour supply, etc.). Thankfully, there is at least

18 For example, in 1 Samuel 10:6 (ERV), the prophet Samuel tells Saul that, “the LORD’s Spirit will come on you with great power. You will be changed. You will be like a different man”.

one published group of economists whose work has addressed various “soft” underlying causes that, according to their findings, drive different factors that impede growth in GDP and which are therefore relevant to this study. In various papers on the subject, Baaske, Hussain and Millendorfer, from the STUDIA group, describe these causes (e.g. 1987:239) as “the mechanisms that create an atmosphere that determines the adverse development of these sources and thus slow down the [economic] growth rate”. Consequently, they have labelled these underlying causes as “growth retarding factors”, and have used both hard economic data and the analysis of socio-psychological phenomena to identify four key sets: (1) State, (2) Megalomania,¹⁹ (3) Isolation, and (4) Levelling.

The group examined two 10-year and one 20-year data sets (1960–1970, 1970–1980 and 1960–1980) that originated from 19 OECD countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (West), Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. There is extensive literature available that discusses the growth retardant factor entitled “State”, which examines the negative consequences of massive state expenditure and inefficient government intervention in the economies of different countries. In fact, according to Baaske et al (1987:240), during the 1960s, government expenditure was “one of the most important growth retarding factors”;²⁰ and, for the period 1960–1980, it alone was responsible for not less than 45 per cent of the explanation of growth slowdown. However, in terms of this study, the most significant of the growth retardant factors identified by this group is the one labelled “Isolation”, which I contend is an excellent gauge of moral decline.²¹ Understandably, moral decline per se is not something we would normally expect to find as the subject of empirical economic research; perhaps because it appears difficult to either examine or articulate in statistical terms. Consequently, Baaske et al (1987:243) chose to focus on particular circumstances in which the *impact* of Isolation (and the underlying moral decline)

19 STUDIA have sometimes used “Centralization” as a substitute label for the growth retardant factor referred to above as “Megalomania”. Both terms are used to describe the creation and proliferation of mega-corporations or institutions that devour or supplant numerous smaller economic units that are by nature decentralized and thus more efficient and successful at stimulating growth. Interestingly, Ball (2004:274) argues that where Megalomania-Centralization occurs, namely, “in an economy dominated by a small number of large firms, we should expect deeper, more severe recessions”.

20 For example, Polanyi (1968) has shown that the average rate of return of nationalised (i.e. state-owned) industries is less than one-third that of private industry.

21 Skinner’s comment (1963:6) that Yahweh, the ultimate personification of spirituality, “was revealed to Israel (by the prophets) as a *moral* personality” (emphasis added) allows us to accept a connection between spirituality and morality in this context.

in society can be observed and also measured, commenting that “The most important [impact], and at the same time the source of several other social ills, is the deteriorating quality of family life, leading to isolation”, hence their choice of label for this particular growth retardant factor.

To measure what *prima facie* might appear to be a nebulous social phenomenon, they selected a range of statistical proxies in the form of (a) the illegitimate birth rate,²² (b) the divorce rate, and (c) the suicide rate.²³ In addition, the group utilised statistical results from research by Klein (1975, in *STUDIA*, 1985: 12) of female death rates due to cervical carcinoma, in order to quantify another factor of moral decline: promiscuity. Using these statistical proxies, the group’s calculation of the regression coefficient for Isolation for the period 1960–1970 was -0.7 , which was of a greater magnitude than the results for the other three growth retardant factors during that same period: i.e. State (-0.51), Megalomania (-0.44), and Levelling (-0.24).²⁴ However, for the second half of the period examined (1970–1980), the regression coefficient for Isolation was just -0.3 , compared to State (-1.04), Levelling (-0.35) and Megalomania (-0.26).²⁵ Nevertheless, moral decline (which covers a plethora of underlying social problems) remained a significant factor in retarding economic growth during the overall twenty year period under review.

The authors acknowledge the novel nature of their research and have issued the following word of caution (*STUDIA*, 1985:52): “In quite a new field where there is no mature theory, we have to be careful in deriving a hypothesis from empirical data. The best way to cope with this difficulty is a redundancy in an abundance of empirical observations”. Therefore, on the one hand, I recognise that, without further exploration of this combination of socio-psychological and economic phenomena by other researchers, the findings of a single group may not be considered conclusive in establishing a plausible relationship between “sin” and economic downturn. On the other hand, Baaske et al have analysed more than enough empirical data and observations (e.g. from 19 OECD countries over a 20 year period) to ensure that their findings merit

22 The group’s findings (*STUDIA*, 1985:11) show that “the illegitimate birth rate and growth of GDP are significantly correlated”.

23 The group assert (*STUDIA*, 1985:10) that suicide is both an important meter of mental health and also the most useful measure of cultural stress. They also refer to the high suicide rate amongst divorcees and claim that the correlation between suicide and divorce is one of the most widely tested in social science. Finally, they also mention that heavy drinking habits can be found amongst divorced people, a further factor of social/moral decline.

24 See *STUDIA* (1985:12).

25 See Table 17.1, in Baaske et al (1987:245).

both our interest and a significant degree of credibility. On that basis, we have reasonable grounds to accept that their secular research supports the premise behind Yahweh's condemnatory remark given above: i.e. there was a plausible spiritual-moral rationale for Judah's economic woes at the time.

This then begs the question whether or not the opposite might also be true: Is there a correlation between moral resurgence and economic upturns? Interestingly, the STUDIA research cited here was conducted partly in response to a question posed by Vaizey (1981, in STUDIA, 1985:57): "Is Sigmund Freud's thesis that sublimation is a precondition for cultural creativity also true for all kinds of creative activities, including creativity for technical and economical innovation"? Freud's explanation of sublimation implies conditions of moral discipline in which sexual drives are controlled. Thus, the opposite condition, when sexual drives are *not* controlled, is de-sublimation: e.g. promiscuity, which Baaske et al have shown to correlate with the retardation or lack of economic growth.

As Millendorfer argues in an earlier solo paper (1983:140), intensive (economic) growth rates, which "are caused by a more efficient use of the factor input due to technological progress", and therefore dependent on "innovations based on creativity", show a negative correlation with de-sublimation (and thus a positive correlation with sublimation).²⁶ The group cite the link, first identified by Joseph Schumpeter in 1934, between technical innovation and the upturns in economic long waves that depict periods of economic recovery and which Schumpeter referred to as "innovational pushes".²⁷ These, according to van Duijn (1983:98), involve the development and commercial exploitation of new production processes and organizational changes, as well as new products.²⁸ Consequently, Baaske et al (STUDIA, 1985:58–59) argue that there is a definite link between these innovational pushes, which rely on technical innovation (a form of industrial/commercial creativity), and sublimation,

26 Freud defined "sublimation" as the process in which sexual drives are redirected into acts of higher social value; a process that, according to Wade and Tavris (2000:478), often "serves a higher cultural or socially useful purpose, as in the creation of art or *inventions*" (emphasis added).

27 This link is highlighted by Mensch in the subtitle of his 1975 book, *Stalemate in Technology*; namely, "innovations overcome the depression".

28 van Duijn (1983:106) cites the findings by Hartmann and Wheeler (1979) that, in Britain at least, the growth rate of patents sealed (a proxy for the number of inventions) is highest during economic downturn periods. However, he also explains (1983:66) that, according to Kondratieff (1926), there is a difference between "invention", which often occurs during the lower end of economic downturns, and "innovation", in which inventions are applied and commercially exploited on a large scale; normally at the beginning of the next upturn.

which equates to high moral standards and conduct; and so claim that their findings provide empirical support for a positive answer to Vaizey's question. Therefore, I would also argue that there is a plausible relationship between moral resurgence and economic upturns.

Baaske et al (STUDIA, 1985:54–55) also explain that David McClelland's achievement-motivation index depicts a sequence in which high quality of family life (the opposite of Isolation) leads to high achievement-motivation, and this in turn leads to high economic systems performance: i.e. prosperity. However, a socio-psychological feedback system developed by the STUDIA group (1987:251, Figure 17.4) shows that, when McClelland's index is extended, dominance of the economic system over the human realm leads to a decrease in the quality of family life and a corresponding increase in Isolation. If I may introduce some biblical language here, it seems that, as Christ suggested in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13, the human engineers of economic growth and prosperity progressively become a δούλος (*doulos*; literally, a 'slave, bondman or [person] of servile condition') of "mammon". And their increasing isolation from quality family life, amongst other things, not only creates an impediment to further economic growth, but also causes the high economic systems performance to regress to the mean – and eventually to the "norm" of lack/scarcity.²⁹

The group assert that there is a 25 to 30 year time lag between the pinnacle and nadir of an economic systems performance phase, which produces oscillations of cycles of between 50 and 60 years: i.e. so-called economic long waves. And, starting with an earlier solo paper, Millendorfer (1983:143) has regularly argued that, if the socio-psychological, economic mechanisms outlined by his STUDIA group correspond to reality, then the length of the cycle is determined by something like anthropological constants governing the dynamics of the interrelationships between the generations. If correct, humanity's array of interventionist instrumental variables and political tools are essentially powerless to actually eliminate the cycle – and can only help to minimise any negative impact of each cycle. In fact, Millendorfer suggests that, in the absence of truly effective economic and political remedial tools, the best we can do is to try and minimise the negative effects and degree of each downturn. Therefore, economically speaking, the human race appears to be locked in some kind of tragic and predictable, multi-generational "dance" in which the performers and the music may change, but the dance remains the same.

Consequently, I suggest that the arguments put forward above provide plausible reasons to accept a correlation between spiritual/moral and economic conditions – both good and bad. It would seem that the perverse combination

29 See Chapter 13.1, *Solving the endemic problem of scarcity*.

of positive attributes and predictable flaws present in human nature ensure that the human dynamics underpinning economic activity contain the seeds of both its success and its downfall; hence its cyclical nature, as implied in the text of Joel 1–2 and elsewhere.

12.6 The Purpose behind the Salvation-Restoration Oracle

Generally speaking, in the minds of most Christians, prosperity and spirituality have a negative correlation; their opinions no doubt shaped by memories of Sunday school lessons concerning Christ's conversation with the rich young ruler,³⁰ whose trust in riches was so great, he missed out on Yahweh's best for him. Also, there are OT passages in which Yahweh either complained or prophesied that, in times of prosperity, His people would ignore or even forsake Him. For example:

Jeshurun [Israel] grew fat and kicked. You became fat, you grew thick, you were gorged and sleek! Then he forsook God Who made him and forsook and despised the Rock of his salvation.

Deuteronomy 32:15

I spoke to you in your prosperity; You said I will not listen.

Jeremiah 22:21

As a result, the received wisdom within modern Christianity is opposed to the weight of scripture; namely, there is a widespread assumption that a direct relationship exists between spirituality and "lack". However, this view demonstrates a superficial understanding of the purpose behind the different phases of the spiritual-economic cycle, since both lack and prosperity should be understood as merely the means to an end, and not as ends in themselves.

As depicted in the OT salvation-restoration oracles, the economic and psychological pressure of lack/scarcity is intended to force the people of Yahweh to their knees – in repentance. However, repentance does not equate to true (i.e. mature) spirituality. In fact, repentance is merely a desire (or motivation) to change one's ways and take the necessary first steps on a journey that will eventually lead to a state of true spirituality. Nevertheless, as a reward for that repentance, Yahweh promises to reinstate His covenantal blessing, which

30 Matthew 19:16–21; Mark 10:17–11; and Luke 18:18–23.

kick-starts the outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine”: i.e. economic recovery, leading on to prosperity. Then (or *afterwards*, to quote Joel 2:28), Yahweh apparently (a) puts a new heart and a new spirit within His people, and also (b) pours out His Spirit – in order to provide them with what Zimmerli (1982:248) refers to as “a power which gives a man strength to do new things”, and which will also enable Yahweh “to participate directly in man’s new obedience”. Consequently, this level of spiritual empowering is designed to help the people of Yahweh overcome the human limitations and inadequacies that had previously caused them to fail to keep the obedience requirements of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant.

Thus, in a sense, the aim of providing an outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” in tandem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to help ensure that the penitents (collectively and/or individually) have a powerful external/economic incentive *as well as* the internal/spiritual fortitude and moral fibre to remain obedient and continue to serve Yahweh – rather than some alternative source of “provision”, divine or otherwise – once they have ‘turned back’ to Him. Therefore, any relationship between the two outpourings is best understood in terms of their linked purpose. As mentioned above, in the first instance, the *purpose* of lack is to bring Yahweh’s people to their knees – in repentance. Secondly, the *purpose* of the outpouring of divine prosperity is to (a) reward the people for ‘turning back’ to Yahweh, and (b) prove to them that He (and not some other deity-source) is *Yəhōvâ yir’ê*, their divine ‘provider’ (Genesis 22:14).³¹ Finally, the *purpose* of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to empower those same people to (hopefully) stay ‘turned back’ – and not fall back into their old, rebellious and disobedient ways.

That is the divine stratagem behind the link/relationship between economic and spiritual transformation: i.e. “revival”. However, the question remains as to whether or not the provision of economic blessing – as part of the fulfilment of the OT salvation-restoration oracles – was intended as a one-off event, to perhaps help finance the launch of the Christian church, or something that was meant to be timeless. Based on a simple survey discussed in Chapter 20, I argue for the latter.

31 According to Strong’s Concordance, *Yəhōvâ yir’ê* (literally ‘God sees’, but often interpreted as ‘God our Provider’) is the “symbolic name given by Abraham to Mount Moriah in commemoration of the interposition of the angel of Jehovah who prevented the sacrifice of Isaac and *provided* a substitute” (emphasis added).

12.7 The 'Reform' versus 'Sectarian' Model

Skinner (1963:76) points out that the OT prophets experienced a great deal of anguish and frustration preaching repentance to a people who seemed incapable of it; all the while knowing that the fate of their nation was sealed, even though Yahweh stood ready to forgive His people. Obviously, the prophets had no inclination of when or how the Messiah would come, or how the messianic age of restoration would manifest.³² All they knew is that both were integral to Yahweh's ultimate solution to the seemingly unsolvable problems of a rebellious people. This knowledge gap and attendant feelings of frustration may also help explain some of the emotional problems experienced by the prophets.³³

Also, the assignments undertaken by the prophets were undoubtedly made more difficult by the fact that they were chosen/called by Yahweh to proclaim the need for significant reform within both palace and temple (which invariably conflicted with the vested interests of the incumbent leadership of those institutions), and also on a collective basis amongst the seemingly intransigent people of Israel and/or Judah. On the other hand, the apostle Peter, the prototype of spiritual leadership within the new covenant, had an easier task, comparatively speaking, since he preached an overtly sectarian message in Acts 2,³⁴ which urged the people to extract themselves from the larger, national group deserving of Yahweh's judgement, and become part of something new, formed out of a godly remnant.³⁵ In fact, by the first century CE, there was a long and well-established tradition of a devout "remnant" (Hebrew: *שְׂרִיד*, *sārīd*) being blessed by Yahweh (i.e. reaping the benefits of material blessings promised in the Mosaic-Sinai covenant) – as opposed to the entire tribal or national group, if and when they and their institutions were reformed (See Joel 2:32 *cf.* Acts 2:21.). Therefore, on the Day of Pentecost, this tradition would also have

32 In 1 Peter 1:10, 12, the apostle writes that, "The prophets, who prophesied of the grace (divine blessing) which was intended for you, searched and inquired earnestly about this salvation [...] It was then disclosed to them that the services they were rendering were not meant for themselves *and* their period of time, but for you".

33 For example, in Jeremiah 8:18, the prophet laments, "Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow, for my grief is beyond healing; my heart is sick and faint within me!"

34 This is supported by Bovon (1992:188–189), who suggests that Luke-Acts may be described as "an exercise in legitimating a sectarian movement".

35 According to Johnson (1992:58), "To be saved from a larger population obviously means to be part of a remnant people". Also, in his commentary on Acts 2:40, Bruce (1990:31) writes that "In σωθήτε there is an echo of σωθήσεται, quoted from Joel 2:32 [...] In both the Joel oracle and the present context the word applies to a 'remnant' which will be delivered from the catastrophe destined to overtake the mass of the people".

provided both context and meaning for those devout/pious Jews from all over the Diaspora who were listening attentively to Peter's sermon.

Of particular interest is the fact that, unlike the OT "reform" model, which requires a critical mass of collective repentance, the NT "sectarian" model offers/grants the repentant individual entry into a community of fellow-penitents who, as a community, qualify for the collective economic benefits of 'turning back' to Yahweh,³⁶ as well as numerous spiritual benefits from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As such, the sectarian model allows the prophet, apostle and/or preacher – not to mention Yahweh – to "think outside the box" concerning a particular tribe or nation, such as Israel or Judah, since it opens the door for the inclusion of other, often unrelated individuals and/or groups, as we find in Acts 10 and beyond. Consequently, the sectarian model not only offers a solution to the age-old, recurring problems involved in attempting to secure a collective repentance within the national religion, often exacerbated by a resistance to change amongst the nation's power elite, it also provides a strategic platform for major, if not unlimited expansion.³⁷

36 In Ephesians 1:6, the apostle Paul informs a gentile-filled congregation that, in return for their repentance and conversion, they are "accepted in the Beloved" (KJV). Here, 'accepted' is rendered from χαριτόω (*charitoō*, 'to peruse with grace, compass with favour'; also, 'to honour with blessings').

37 The degree of expansion involved, for example, in order that Christ's disciples could become His witnesses "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NASB).

Prosperity in Its Proper Context

13.1 Solving the Endemic Problem of Scarcity

Taken out of its biblical context, the idea of material/economic blessing is in danger of being misunderstood; perhaps because “a surplus of prosperity” is usually equated with “excess” in the pejorative sense. However, in its proper context, prosperity represents a much needed solution to the most critical and endemic of all economic problems: scarcity.

According to Gordon (1989:xi), “For most economists, the [principal] economic problem is the problem of scarcity”,¹ which has been a “continuing element of the human condition” for most of history. He also asserts (1989:1) that the Yahwist, one of the earliest contributors to the Hebrew scriptures, believed that “the problem of scarcity is an ever-present burden for the bulk of mankind”, and suggests that this condition is a direct consequence of the fall of man when, because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the ground became cursed, with the result that “the acquisition of the means of life is a task involving continual struggle and personal cost”, as prophesied in Genesis 3:17.

And to Adam [Yahweh] said, Because you have listened and given heed to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it, the ground is under a curse because of you;² in sorrow and toil shall you eat [of the fruits] of it all the days of your life.

However, Gordon goes on to explain that Yahweh (as depicted by different OT authors) has provided various strategic solutions to this problem. For instance, the problem of scarcity can be overcome by the application of faith, as we find described in the biographical detail of Noah, Abraham and Moses. And, as part of his explanation of this particular divine stratagem, Gordon (1989:6) provides

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- 1 Gordon (1989:xi) claims that most economists appear to be in broad, general agreement with this argument, which was first suggested by Robbins (1935), as being part of the foundations of economics.
 - 2 In LXX Genesis 3:17 and OT Pseudepigrapha *Vita Adae et Evae* xxiv 1 (a/k/a *Apocalypse of Moses*), ἐπικαταρατος ἡ γῆ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις σου is rendered “cursed is the ground in thy labours (or works)”, which Agrell (1976:36) interprets as meaning that man's work with the soil is cursed, rather than the soil itself.

us with a basic but useful definition of faith: the willingness to do something that does not make sense.

In its beginning, mankind [personified in the characters of Adam and Eve] disobeyed a command which did not appear to make sense. By contrast, Abraham obeys a command which does not appear to make sense.³ Noah, it is true, anticipates Abraham in that he is willing to involve himself in the seeming absurdity of constructing a queer kind of ship in the midst of dry land.

We are informed that this willingness to do something that does not make sense resulted in Yahweh's blessing, which includes economic prosperity. For example, Noah and his sons were blessed – becoming fruitful and multiplying to fill the earth (Genesis 9:1); and Abraham became “extremely rich in livestock and in silver and in gold” (Genesis 13:2).

The second stratagem by which the problem of scarcity can be overcome, we are told by the Yahwist, is the application of wisdom, as exemplified by the lives of Jacob and Joseph. According to Gordon's interpretation (1989:7), Jacob used great skill and wisdom in animal husbandry to grow “exceedingly rich, and [he] had many sheep and goats, and maidservants, menservants, camels and donkeys” (Genesis 30:43). However, his son Joseph surpassed his achievements to become the governor-chancellor of Egypt, and established a royal grain bank for Pharaoh that was designed to maximise the benefits derived from the surplus harvests of seven years of “plenty” in order to overcome the scarcity of the seven years of “lack” that followed.⁴ Finally, Yahweh's third stratagem for overcoming scarcity is via rigorous observance of the Mosaic-Sinai law, which Gordon (1989:11) describes as “By far the most durable of the general solutions of the Old Testament for success in dealing with the economic problem [of scarcity]”, and is intended to reward obedient followers with “a surplus of prosperity, through the fruit of your body, of your livestock, and of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you” (Deuteronomy 28:11).⁵

3 At Yahweh's command (Genesis 12:1–4), Abraham left Haran, one of the main regional centres of civilisation and economic activity, for an unspecified destination, which is an act of great faith since, according to von Rad (1972:161), “to leave home and to break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient man almost the impossible”.

4 See Chapter 4.5, *The ancient Jewish connection with banking*.

5 According to Armstrong (1997:88), rigorous observance of the 613 *mitzvot* that constitute the Mosaic-Sinai law, which address not just ritual purity but also the proper treatment of other human beings, was designed to “restore [to the people of Judah and Israel] the intimacy that

The common denominator in all three stratagems is that the people of Yahweh are required to do something: i.e. divine prosperity requires human cooperation. They either have to do something that does not make sense. Or they have to apply wisdom that is divinely inspired and which, to humans, may appear unwise and also risky. Or they have to obey a range of spiritual-moral “commandments” – which is not as easy as it sounds, since scripture abounds with accounts of blatant and widespread disobedience of these edicts, with the attendant economic consequences.⁶ In fact, in order to overcome the continuing/recurring economic problem of scarcity, it is possible that all three divine stratagems need to be applied at any given time – and on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, if scarcity/lack is indeed so endemic (a “continuing element of the human condition” for most of history), it should therefore perhaps be considered the norm: i.e. the *default* economic condition, as suggested in a comment by the German economist and sociologist, Werner Sombart, who stated that “The so-called natural state of modern economic life is the depression”.⁷

Consequently, upturns in economic cycles should be regarded as movements in a positive direction *away* from the norm of scarcity/lack: i.e. depression. Conversely, economic downturns represent instances in which socio-psychological and other factors drive economic forces that pull regional and/or national economies down to the norm. Nevertheless, in both cases, some sort of significant, *proactive* effort is required – either to generate the positive or counteract the negative factors of the seemingly unalterable, cyclical nature of human economic activity. For example, Schumpeter’s “innovational pushes” that help kick-start periods of recovery leading on to prosperity; or, on the other hand, actions/programmes that are designed to minimize the impact of human socio-psychological forces that create economic downturns. Either way, a particular type of effort is required: one that involves a combination of spiritual, moral and economic factors, as discussed previously.

Interestingly, the recurring economic pattern of regression (to the mean and beyond to the norm of lack/scarcity) can also be seen in modern corporate performance. For example, Foster and Kaplan (2001) have used the McKinsey Corporate Performance Database to track the TRS (“Total Return to Shareholders”) of 1,008 US companies in 15 different industries between 1962

Adam and Eve had enjoyed with Yahweh when He had walked with them in the garden”. But again, as Westermann (1991:272) explains, “the restoration of a whole relationship with God [...] includes of necessity the restoration of all other areas of life as well” – which would include economic restoration.

6 Hence the need for the involvement of a greater power, the Holy Spirit, to help Yahweh’s people overcome their shortcomings in this area.

7 Cited in van Gelderen (1913:458).

and 1998. From this study, they determined (2001:47) that innovative companies generally enter an industry or marketplace with a competitive edge over established companies, outperforming the industry average by a considerable margin. However, “Eventually, [their] performance deteriorates to the industry average, and then below”. They give three reasons for this pattern of deterioration (2001:48), one of which is that the high performing entrant to the market “falls prey to cultural lock-in and can no longer create innovation on the scale that brought [the] original success”. In their definition of “cultural lock-in”, they cite a growing fear of risk, which causes management to play it safe and also impose control systems that are intended to ensure *predictable* and thus seemingly manageable growth, but which stifles creativity and innovation.⁸

At this point, the company’s market position/share becomes exposed to possible predation from one or more new entrants willing to take greater risks and be more innovative. Eventually, the former innovator’s sales and/or financial results fall to the point where the company itself is vulnerable to a takeover by an outside group who believe they can do a better job than the incumbent, risk-averse management. Therefore, without a sustained willingness to take risks and, at times, do things that to others may not make sense (a key attribute of religious faith), even superior economic performance and/or results will invariably regress to the mean or average – a well-proven statistical phenomenon – and eventually to the norm of scarcity. In the corporate environment, that norm is represented by a scarcity of income, invariably accompanied by a lack of profit: the core *raison d’être* for the existence of corporations, or at least the yardstick by which they are judged in the marketplace. Finally, according to Foster and Kaplan’s research (2001:47), the average period between the peak and nadir of this corporate performance phase is around 25 years, which is uncannily similar to the findings of Millendorfer et al from their survey of the economic results of 19 OECD countries: i.e. 25 to 30 years, or approximately one human generation, as discussed previously.

8 On a similar note, a survey of 519 companies spread across more than 12 industry sectors in France, the UK and the USA (conducted by international management consultants, Accenture) found that companies are struggling to turn investments designed to spur innovation into meaningful results; in part because they do not take enough risks. See http://www.accenture.com/us-en/Pages/insight-low-risk-innovation-costly.aspx?c=mc_prposts_10000040&n=otc_1013; accessed on May 18th 2013. Interestingly, according to Mensch (1975:180), it is only when the situation gets really dire that enterprises are “forced to overcome their aversion to risk-taking”.

13.2 The Practical Application of 'Faith'

In early 2009, I had a private conversation with Brigadier Trevor Minter who, after a successful career in the British Army, was then Director of the Kent Partnership, the multi-agency, strategic partnership for the county of Kent in the United Kingdom. Brigadier Minter told me that he grew up in the county, in the economically-deprived seaside municipality of Folkestone; and, at the time of our conversation, 46 per cent of the working age population of his childhood town were on benefits: i.e. "a burden on the public purse", as welfare recipients used to be described. Ultimately, our discussion focused on the question of why so many people who have access to government-sponsored programmes that are designed to lead to economic and social improvement fail to utilise those programmes for their own benefit, and also the benefit of their community. It is a question that has exercised the minds of numerous economists and politicians over the years.

As suggested earlier, one of the problems hindering secular economic efforts can be a lack of faith – in perhaps a government, an institution, or more likely the people involved; or alternatively, a person's lack of faith in their own ability to improve their lot in life. Understandably, orthodox economists prefer to use a word without "supernatural" connotations; consequently, Easterly (2002:167–168) talks about the power and impact of "expectations". He writes (concerning lower income countries):

High expectations are enough to get the economy out of the poverty trap. Conversely, bad expectations could take a country that was above the poverty trap and send it down into the poverty trap. You won't invest if you think that no one else is going to be investing.⁹ Whether an economy gets rich or poor can depend on whether everyone expects it to get rich or poor.

van Duijn (1983:139) agrees that "Investment behavior is very much determined by expectations". He also cautions that "Once expectations change, whether for real reasons or for imagined reasons, it is difficult to turn them around". Furthermore, Easterly (2002:167–168) suggests that "Expectations could be a source of the instability of growth rates that we observe in practice. A single

9 Likewise, international hedge fund CEO, George Soros, contends that, in the capital markets, future events are shaped by current expectations (mentioned in Slater, 1996:48). And, in a similar vein, Keynes (1973:161) suggests that "a large proportion of our positive [economic] activities depend on spontaneous optimism".

shock to the system could change expectations overnight. You suddenly expect everyone else to stop investing, so you stop investing.¹⁰ The expectations story could explain the Latin American growth crash after the debt crisis in 1982, the Mexican crash in 1995, and the East Asian crash in 1997–1998. Growth changes more violently than is justified by a change in fundamentals because expectations change abruptly”.

Thus, high expectations (which lead to growth and prosperity) may be interpreted as faith in a positive outcome for one's efforts. Conversely, low expectations (which can either keep people trapped in poverty, or else lead to a reversal of fortunes for a previously prosperous group) may be interpreted as a lack of faith in a positive outcome for one's efforts. The latter, it would appear, induces a psychological state of inertia, resulting in a lack of any kind of proactive effort, and thus ensures regression to the mean, and eventually to the norm: i.e. scarcity or lack.¹¹ Therefore, it is possible that the application of faith could help to overcome what might be described as a person's or a nation's economic “fate”; namely, the so-called “norm” of lack/scarcity. Consequently, it would be counterproductive if religion, which is premised upon faith (specifically, “faith in supernatural forces”),¹² was ignored in either the planning or execution of pertinent economic projects or programmes, since its potential impact in terms of what Easterly calls “expectations” could mean the difference between success and failure. Unfortunately, governments and academia as a whole do not fully appreciate this often untapped and under-exploited potential within Yahweh's human creation; perhaps because they fail to grasp how natural the “supernatural” can be.

So, how does faith work in practical terms? More importantly, how does one explain faith to economists or social scientists, whose work is inherently atheistic? Even though this study deals predominantly with the people of Yahweh, the following example of faith leading to a practical, beneficial outcome comes from the Buddhist tradition. Located in the Chinese province

10 Ball (2004:294, 416–7) explains that “future market behaviour depends on what traders and investors *believe* that behaviour will be [...] Market traders buy and sell on the basis of *beliefs* about the market: whether the prevailing feeling is optimistic (so that others will buy) or pessimistic (when everyone wants to sell)” (emphasis added).

11 Lack of faith and/or negative expectations are often driven by fear of some kind, and (as mentioned elsewhere) Hebrews 10:38 records Yahweh's displeasure when such negative expectations lead people to give up and thus fail to continue with any proactive action: “the just shall live by faith; and if he draws back and shrinks in fear, My soul has no delight or pleasure in him”.

12 According to Stark and Bainbridge's definition of religion (1985:3–8), given earlier.

of Sichuan, the “Da Fo”, or Giant Buddha of Leshan,¹³ is one of China’s most important Buddhist sites and the largest stone Buddha in the world: i.e. 233 feet (71 metres) high. Below the cliff where the statue is located is a confluence of three rivers: the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi, whose treacherous currents, in ancient times, would regularly sweep local fishermen to their deaths. The construction of the giant statue was initiated in 713 CE (during the Tang Dynasty) by a monk called Haitong, who hoped that the Buddha’s presence would protect the local boatmen.

The project was finally completed in 803 CE, forty years after Haitong’s death; and his efforts to make this particular stretch of river safer were eventually successful, as the huge amount of rubble extracted as a result of the statue’s construction filled in much of the river bed and thus slowed down the currents. In other words, a large-scale, long-term project that was started on the basis of faith in some sort of divine intervention achieved its goals as a result of physical phenomena whose mechanics lay beyond the existing knowledge and understanding of those who participated in the task. However, without the participants’ primitive and naïve level of faith, the project would never have been undertaken, let alone finished; and the subsequent physical benefits would therefore not have been realised. This is an excellent example of how natural the “supernatural” can be – and also how important faith can be in the planning and execution of major projects. In this instance, there is a rational explanation for what caused the currents to slow down and consequently make the area safe for river traffic.

However, sometimes the application of faith can result in circumstances when natural forces do not appear to act in a natural way. For example, Leviticus 25:1–5 describes the OT law of *shmita* (‘to let fall’ or ‘to let drop’),¹⁴ in which Yahweh demanded that His people allow their land to “rest” (i.e. lie fallow) every seventh year.¹⁵

And the Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai,

Say to the Israelites, When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath to the Lord.

13 The statue is not Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, but his disciple Maitreya, also a Buddha. In 1996, UNESCO listed the statue and surrounding Mount Emei Scenic Area as a World Heritage site.

14 See the *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (1997:631). *Shmita* is also called the sabbatical year or *shəvi’it* (literally, ‘seventh’).

15 See also Exodus 23 and Deuteronomy 15; the latter reference to *shmita* also involves the cancellation of debts.

For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits.

But in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord; you shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.

What grows of itself in your harvest you shall not reap and the grapes on your uncultivated vine you shall not gather, for it is a year of rest to the land.

As Stanley (2004:8) explains, observance of *shmita* – commencing at *Rosh Hashanah*, sometime in September – requires farmers to refrain for a full year from (a) sowing vegetable crops or planting trees, (b) pruning vines or fruit trees, and (c) normal levels of harvesting and/or picking of fruit.¹⁶ Not only is this course of action counterintuitive for experienced farmers (i.e. it does not make sense), it is also potentially problematic if not disastrous. Nevertheless, in his brief field study amongst farmers on *kibbutz* and *moshav* in modern Israel,¹⁷ Stanley (2004:11ff.) managed to locate and interview some nineteen individuals and/or groups who had been observing *shmita*, and were thus willing to risk potential economic ruin in the belief or hope that Yahweh would keep His promise to bless them if they were obedient to this particular aspect of the Torah.

For instance, one of the potential problems in observing *shmita* is that, if you do not prune fruit trees properly each year, under normal circumstances, you will not get full growth in the following year. In fact, in some extreme cases, the tree can even die; which, to quote Jon Nathan,¹⁸ one of the farmers interviewed by Stanley, results in “lots of expense and no income”. However, Yitzhak Novik,¹⁹ another interviewee, stated that, during a critical point of one *shmita* year, the weather turned unexpectedly cold, with the result that any orchard owners who pruned their trees that year had no fruit; whereas, he was “one of

16 Agrell (1976:24) explains that “normal levels of harvesting” involved heavy, organised work, which invariably requires tools (or machinery, these days) and large containers to capture/store the harvested crop. This kind of activity is not permitted during *shmita*; however, you are allowed to manually gather enough for your immediate needs; more importantly, you are required to allow “the poor” to do likewise.

17 Stanley’s field study was undertaken between the *shmita* years of 5761 and 5768 in the Jewish calendar, which ran from September to September in 2000–2001 and 2007–2008.

18 Jon Nathan (cited in Stanley, 2004:13) is an orchardist producing peaches and nectarines at the farming settlement of Moshav Avne Eitan, on the Golan Heights, directly east of the Sea of Galilee and close to the Syrian border.

19 Yitzhak Novik (cited in Stanley, 2004:14) farms in the Jewish settlement of Ofra, on the West Bank, in the Judean hills.

the only farmers in Israel that had nectarines and therefore there was a lot of demand for them". He also claimed that the same weather anomaly occurred the following *shmita* year, seven years later, but did not occur in any of the six years in between. A third interviewee, David Israel,²⁰ explained, in simple terms, the way in which Yahweh promises to look after those who observe *shmita*, and also what happened on his *kibbutz* when they did.

In the Torah we are promised that – if you keep *shmita* – in the sixth year,²¹ in the year before *shmita*, you will have a much greater yield and it is interesting to see the number of occasions on which *kibbutzim* have found that that has actually happened [...] We had an example ourselves; in one field we were growing *bachia* – that's a cattle fodder, and the yield of that year was about 500kg per dunam and that was for the people who did not keep *shmita*,²² who sowed their fields at the usual time [...] (Yet) this field of ours had a yield of over 600kg per dunam and people came all around to see this field and they were absolutely astounded.

Finally, Baruch Adiri,²³ a farmer who raises sheep for meat and milk, and normally has 1200 dunams of his land under barley and wheat, reported a similar but somewhat more creative form of "blessing" for being obedient to the Torah:

In the *shmita* year when I don't plant my barley and wheat, I lose a lot of income. Yet – let's say that each 100 ewes normally give me 125 to 130 lambs – in the *shmita* year they actually give birth to about 180 lambs. This compensates for the income I lose when I don't plant my barley and wheat. In the year before the last *shmita*, all my sheep were eating out in the fields. In late summer the first rain damaged the grass so I had to move all the sheep inside to feed them via a feed lot for about 100 days. In the *shmita* year, all the rain was in Be'er Sheva, a long way from us. The

20 David Israel (cited in Stanley, 2004:16) farms on the Kibbutz Sha'alvim, which is located centrally between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in the foothills of the Judean mountains, in the region known as Shephelah. The main agricultural activities of the kibbutz are vineyards, wheat and cotton.

21 Leviticus 25:21 in fact promises that the harvest in the pre-*shmita* (i.e. sixth) year will be plentiful enough to eat from for three years.

22 A 'dunam' (from the Ottoman-Turkish, *dönmek*) is a measurement of land area used in the region covered by the ex-Ottoman Empire, and originally represented the amount of land that could be ploughed in a day. In ancient times, a 'dunam' varied from 900–2500 m²; however, in modern Palestine, it measures 1,000 m².

23 Baruch Adiri (cited in Stanley, 2004:18) owns a private farm near Ofakim in the southwestern Negev.

water from Be'er Sheva ran down here in the river and, because it was hot, the grass within the river bed grew very, very quickly and that year the sheep were able to feed all year outside. Thus I didn't have to give them anything extra; I didn't have to buy any additional food for them.

The above provide excellent examples of practical outcomes from Gordon's first and third stratagems for overcoming the problem of scarcity: (a) the willingness to do something that does not make sense, which in this case occurred as a result of (b) strict observance of the Mosaic-Sinai law. And the results are more than interesting: anomalies of weather that only occurred during a *shmita* year, and which appear to have only benefitted *shmita*-observant farmers; greater crop yields (e.g. 20 per cent higher) in pre-*shmita* years – again enjoyed only by those obedient to this ancient OT law; and, finally, greater fertility in livestock (e.g. approximately 40 per cent higher) during a *shmita* year – which compensated for loss of income from leaving wheat and barley fields lying fallow, as part of *shmita* observance.

I appreciate that this anecdotal proof is open to question on a number of fronts; however, again, it is not so much the so-called miracle of provision itself that is important here. Instead, what is of particular interest is the willingness of people to do things that do not make sense, and engage in risk-filled projects on the basis of faith and/or obedience to some “divine” decree – which required them to ignore traditional agricultural practices, and also disregard significant peer pressure as well, no doubt.²⁴ Now, seemingly irrational action of this kind might be easy to comprehend amongst naïve eighth-century Buddhist fishermen in some remote area of China, but amongst hard-headed Israeli farmers in the early twenty-first century, such examples of faith cannot be so easily dismissed. Were he interested in these kinds of phenomena, Easterly might suggest that they occurred as a result of the people's expectations. In the eighth century, the Buddhist monk and workers on the gigantic statue *expected* their pious efforts to be rewarded (by Buddha) with protection from treacherous river currents – and that is exactly what happened. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, those Israeli farmers *expected* their

24 According to the Letter to the Hebrews, “Faith is the substance (*hypostasís*, ‘the steadfastness of mind, confidence, trust’) of things hoped for” (11:1); and hope is “an anchor (*agryka*, metaphorically, any ‘stay or safeguard’) for the soul” (6:19). Thus, individual or collective faith may be defined as a psychological, motivational force that causes people to engage and persevere with a project they “believe in”, providing them with some sort of internalised assurance of eventual success – even when faced with opposition or adversity.

pious acts of obedience to the OT law of *shmita* to be rewarded (by Yahweh) with both protection and material blessings – and, again, that is exactly what happened.

Unfortunately, much of the present interest in Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) by International Finance Institutes (IFIs) and western aid/donor organisations does not recognise the spiritual-psychological power of faith as such, but instead focuses almost entirely on the practical issue of improving efficiency and effectiveness within the aid distribution model.²⁵ FBOs are on the ground, have invaluable local knowledge, are plugged into key, local networks, and so offer a viable option for improving aid distribution in most of the less developed countries – especially since the major Christian denominations, for example, have been running mission schools and hospitals in those countries for over a century. To illustrate the extent and scope of FBO operations, Marshall (2005:2) reports that, by some estimates, more than half of all health care and a large proportion of education services in sub-Saharan Africa are provided by FBOs.

Thus, if there is any interest in religion exhibited by economists inside the IFIs, it is based purely on their expectations of a positive outcome from using FBOs as local distribution channels to improve the deployment of aid. Faith and the “supernatural” do not come into it at all. Nevertheless, both development agencies and faith-based groups claim to have the same core agenda: the alleviation of poverty. On that basis, economics and religion are not at odds with each other – even if many of the participants on either side of the debate are. However, if lack of faith (i.e. low or perhaps negative expectations) is both a cause of economic deterioration and a hindrance to economic improvement, then by ignoring the positive motivational power of individual and collective faith, both IFIs and FBOs are ignoring a powerful component within the divine stratagems aimed at solving the very problem they are attempting to resolve: the endemic problem of scarcity or lack. As a result, stripped of its economic component, religion (in particular, the Judeo-Christian tradition) continues to appear deficient and at times impotent in the face of economic adversity. Conversely, without the positive contribution of faith (i.e. positive

25 The secular nature of the current interest in FBOs is illustrated by Benthall (2010), an anthropologist, who argues that FBOs are particularly relevant in development work because: (1) There is a correlation between religious adherence and practical commitment for the disadvantaged; (2) Philanthropy is rooted in religion; (3) Religions give access to vast civil society networks; (4) FBOs provide opportunities to bypass political structures that often lead to squandering and abuse of aid flows; and (5) FBOs can benefit from “cultural proximity” – a privileged relationship between aid donors and aid beneficiaries.

expectations), the IFIs' economic development programmes continue to deliver their less than stellar results.²⁶

Now, if scarcity is the norm, economically speaking, then logic dictates that the "Holy Grail" for economists must be the quest for growth – which Easterly has described in the title of his 2002 book as "elusive". Sadly, Jackson and Fleischer (2007:1) report that, in the literature they reviewed,²⁷ religion is regarded almost unanimously as an *obstacle* to economic growth.²⁸ And I would suggest that this unfortunate state of affairs has arisen in part from the widespread perception that religion and, in particular, the Judeo-Christian tradition and thus the people of Yahweh appear to have nothing to offer the many millions of poor around the globe except charity (usually packaged as aid), which is essentially a voluntary form of redistribution of existing wealth/income from the rich to the poor. Interestingly, Easterly (2002:14) asserts that redistribution is just one way in which the economic condition of the poor could be improved. The other way is to create conditions of economic growth in which the income of both rich and poor rise together.²⁹

Research by Dollar and Kraay (2000; in Easterly, 2002:14, n. 28) found that "a one per cent increase in average income of the society translates one-for-one into a one per cent increase in the incomes of the poorest 20 per cent of the population". Consequently, these findings (plus earlier research by Ravallion and Chen, 1997) suggest that, in Easterly's words (2002:14), "on average, growth has been more of a lifesaver to the poor than redistribution",³⁰ a claim that

26 Clarke (2007:91) concurs to some extent in his call for change amongst western donors. He asserts that the UK Department for International Development, for example, "faces a number of distinct challenges, both conceptual and operational", and therefore must "explore practical overlaps between the previously separate worlds of faith and development".

27 As mentioned previously, Jackson and Fleischer's paper is part of the Religions and Development Research Programme at the University of Birmingham: a five year, £3.5 million project funded by the UK Department for International Development, which confirms the importance that IFIs, western donor groups and development agencies have attached to FBOs in development work and the alleviation of poverty.

28 It may sound odd; however, Barro and McCleary (2002:42) find a positive correlation between religious belief and economic growth, but a negative correlation between church attendance and growth.

29 In fact, I would argue that this scenario is implicit in the Mosaic-Sinai promise that "there will be no poor among you" (Deuteronomy 15:4); especially since the rest of the verse states that these optimal circumstances will occur because "the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you".

30 Hancock & Zahawi agree, stating (2011:217) that, "Across the fast-growing nations, the expansion of the capital market economy has brought billions of people out of grinding poverty. No amount of aid can replace the increased prosperity that such an expansion

religious groups around the world would do well to consider. Then again, some might argue that redistribution is implicit in Christ's remark that "those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last" (Matthew 19:30, 20:16; also Mark 10:31 and Luke 13:30), which is usually interpreted as depicting some form of divinely-ordained reversal of status and/or fortunes.³¹ However, this view ignores the context and also misses the point. Without delving into exegetical detail here, in Matthew's gospel, this statement brackets the parable of the vineyard owner who chooses to pay all his workers the same wage, despite their varied efforts: whether they laboured for a full, 12-hour day or just one hour. On that basis, "those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last" could be interpreted as the economic version of a "dead heat" (i.e. everyone's a winner), which is obviously what Easterly is suggesting.

Thus, from the above, we can see that within its proper, biblical context, prosperity can have a divine purpose for good – rather than being utilised in a perverted way for the kind of self-indulgence and self-aggrandisement with which it is normally associated. However, we cannot leave the issue there. We need to adopt a pragmatic approach and determine some of the "practical applications" of that purpose in everyday life.

of commerce and trade can bring". On the other hand, Easterly (2002:82) also argues that an over-emphasis on economic "redistribution" activities (especially by governments) causes the educated and highly skilled classes of the recipient country to concentrate on those kinds of activities – to the detriment of programmes that would create growth. For a wider-ranging discussion of the political and economic problems associated with government-to-government aid, specifically from the viewpoint of Catholic Social Teaching, see Booth (2007:63–90).

31 For example, Stegemann and Stegemann (1999:202).

The Parables and Words of Christ

14.1 Introduction

Obviously, no treatise dealing with the primitive church would be deemed complete without some consideration of the parables and words of Christ, which influenced almost everything the apostles and their followers did or said. However, because of my professional area of interest and expertise, I have confined the focus here to those parables and edicts that have a connection to economics or banking.

14.2 The Parables of the Entrusted Money

Even though the two versions of this parable ostensibly tell the same story, for some reason that remains unexplained, they depict two distinctly different monetary values: i.e. ‘talents’ in Matthew 25:14–30 and ‘minas’ (or ‘pounds’) in Luke 19:11–27. We are also told that the different versions were preached in different settings. For example, the parable of the minas was delivered out in the open in front of a crowd – following the interaction between Jesus and the tax-gatherer, Zacchaeus, which occurred while Christ was passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. Whereas, the parable of the talents is part of the Mount Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:1–25:46); and the audience is understood to be Christ’s disciples. It also appears to be the last parable delivered by Christ before He was crucified.

In my opinion, the various “guesstimates” of modern values ascribed to ancient money in ET bibles lack credibility, and should therefore not be trusted. For example, in the AMPC and MSG, the suggested (modern) value of the five talents assigned to the first servant (in Matthew 25:15) is “probably about \$5,000”, which would make a single talent worth around USD \$1,000. On the other hand, based on my calculations in Chapter 6.2, a single talent, which was worth 6,000 *denarii* (or 6,000 days’ pay for an agricultural or manual worker in the first century CE), works out to have a modern value somewhere between one and one and a half million US dollars. Also, estimates of the weight of a talent range from 59 to 80 pounds or 26 to 36 kilograms. And, in verse 18, it says that the “wicked” servant ‘dug’ in the earth and hid his master’s money; and the verb ‘to dig’ is *ὀρύσσω* (*oryssō*), which translates as ‘the equivalent of making a

pit' (cf. Matthew 21:33, where the pit was the size of a winepress). Furthermore, by again using wage-rates as an economic numéraire, we can determine that a mina (equal to 100 *denarii*) would be worth between eighteen and twenty-four thousand US dollars today. And we are told that the "wicked" servant was supposedly able to hide this smaller amount in a "handkerchief"; Greek: σουδάριον (*soudarion*, meaning 'napkin, a cloth for wiping perspiration from the face').

Both versions contain the question from the master as to why – rather than hiding the talent or mina – did the wicked servants not use the services of a bank in order to earn interest. The word rendered as 'interest' in both versions is *tokos* which, as explained in Chapter 10.7, should not be interpreted in the pejorative sense as 'usury', since *tokos* equates to the Hebrew *tarbîṭ* ('increment, bonus; also, to take legitimate increase'), which is associated with loans made to or amongst merchants; namely, the kind of loans that were permitted in Hebrew scripture and early scholastic writings, and would no doubt have found approval with Aquinas, Calvin, et al. Therefore, leaving the money 'in a bank' (*trapezan* in Luke 19:23) or 'with the bankers' (*trapezitais* in Matthew 25:27) would have made complete sense to a first-century audience. Interestingly, Matthew 25:15–16 does not indicate what if any instructions were given to the three servants; however, verse 16 states that the first servant "traded" with his five talents to gain five more. The Greek verb is ἐργάζομαι (*ergazomai*, 'to make gains by trading'), which you would expect in a first-century mercantile scenario. On the other hand, in Luke 19:13, the 'master' specifically instructs all ten servants to "trade" or "do business" with the mina they had been given. And here the verb is πραγματεύομαι (*pragmateuomai*), which, according to Strong's Concordance, "in Greek prose writings from Herodotus down [means] 'to be occupied in anything; to carry on a business; specifically, to carry on the business of a banker or trader'" (emphasis added). Thus, we might infer from Luke's use of *pragmateuomai* that he may have been alluding to a banking context here.

However, not only was there a difference in the value of the money mentioned in the two versions, there was also a difference in the results of the "trading" activities. Even though 2 and 5 talents were then (and still today) worth a very large amount of money, the seemingly astonishing claim in Matthew whereby the "good and faithful" servants managed to double their original stakes in the time that the master was absent would in fact have sounded quite plausible to a first-century audience. This is because, as mentioned previously, the maritime or bottomry loans that financed the extensive sea trade throughout the Mediterranean during the Roman-Hellenistic period could earn a flat fee (i.e. profit) of 20 per cent or even more – for loans covering voyages that, according to Cohen (1997:56, n. 83), usually lasted no more than a few

weeks – and yet not incur problems with the biblical edict prohibiting usury. In fact, theoretically speaking, if the wicked servant had been willing to invest the full amount of his original, one talent stake with a banker (and then kept reinvesting the original capital plus all profits, in a series of these highly lucrative, short-term maritime loans), he would only have needed to do so say five or six times in a given period, e.g. less than a year, to actually double his initial investment – barring problems with repayment or disasters at sea, that is.¹

On the other hand, the statement in Luke that both “good” servants were able to each take a single mina and earn an additional 5 or 10 minas with it before the master returned (i.e. a five or ten times increase) might be considered implausible. That said, I have witnessed this kind of increase on various occasions during my banking career when say a million dollar “seed investment” in a start-up (i.e. brand new) technology company ended up worth over ten million dollars if the company either went public or was acquired by a larger, publicly-traded corporation. However, generally speaking, that level of increase is achieved as a result of a uniquely twentieth-century financial procedure practised in western capital markets; therefore, I would hesitate to speculate that such an extraordinary level of profit could occur in first-century Palestine. Nevertheless, it is not impossible. It just depends on the length of time the master was absent, since multiple maritime loans proffered over an extended period (say, two to four years) could indeed increase an original investment by five or ten times.

As mentioned, the master demanded to know why the wicked servant did not ‘put’ the money with (Matthew 25:27) or ‘give’ it to (Luke 19:23) the bankers (or ‘exchangers’ in the KJV). In Matthew’s account, the word ‘put’ is βάλλω (*ballō*, ‘to give over to one’s care uncertain about the results’), which connotes the idea of risk; while, in Luke 19:23, the word ‘give’ is δίδωμι (*didōmi*, ‘to give or commit to some one’s care, intrust commit’), which the MSG and VOICE render – accurately in my opinion – as ‘invest’. As a consequence, both versions of this parable are describing a sophisticated transaction that would have involved bankers operating in “the high finance of the Hellenes”, where loans carried a certain amount of risk, but also had the potential to earn a high reward in return. And what I find of particular interest is that we may infer from the parable in Matthew that Christ and His disciples would not

1 If a single talent (6,000 denarii) were to be loaned out by a banker (on behalf of the ‘good for nothing’ servant) at a *tokos* of 20 per cent and reinvested four more times at the same rate, even with the banker taking a management or handling fee of 25% of the profits from each of those loans, the net result for the client/servant would be 12,068 denarii. So, on paper, we can see how single talent could have been doubled within a year – without the servant having to do anything.

have considered it unusual for wealthy elites or their servants, in first-century Palestine, to invest such large amounts of money (worth in excess of a million US dollars in today's value) with bankers.

In addition, the punishment dealt out to the so-called "wicked" servant is also different in the two versions. In Luke 19:24, he is merely relieved of the single mina that was assigned to him; whereas in Matthew 25:30, the master ordered that the servant described as ἀχρεῖος (*achreios*, 'useless, good for nothing') was to be thrown "into the outer darkness [where] there will be weeping and grinding of teeth". The fact that this version of the parable follows immediately after the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1–13), and is linked to that earlier parable via verse 14, suggests that the parable of the talents is meant to be viewed eschatologically. Furthermore, this suggestion is supported by the particular punishment ordered by the 'master', since being thrown into "the outer darkness where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth" is a form of punishment that is supposedly administered at "the end of the age". And all seven references to this punishment in the NT suggest that it was reserved for unrighteous people, i.e. those not in right-standing with God, which includes "the wicked", "all persons by whom others are drawn into error or sin", wicked servants who ill-treat their fellow servants and instead spend their time carousing, plus those described as pretenders or hypocrites.² Nevertheless, I submit that the parable in Matthew can also be viewed as a cautionary tale for the majority of Christians today.

Matthew 25:15 states that the master distributed the five, two and single talents to each servant "in proportion to his own personal ability" (AMPC) or "particular ability" (DARBY). And I would suggest that the two good servants were assigned larger amounts because they differed from the "good for nothing" servant not only in ability, but also in terms of their commercial experience and/or expertise, amongst other things. As explained above, the customary method in Greco-Roman times of earning enough money to double your initial funds in a reasonably short period of time would be to make a number of maritime or bottomry loans that could earn anywhere between 20 and 30 per cent "profit" within a few weeks. However, as Andreau (1999:56) explains, in order to make those kind of loans with some level of success, the lender "had to be acquainted with the circles of maritime commerce and [also] needed business contacts in [various] Mediterranean ports". In the Roman-Hellenist period, that level of business and networking was carried out by highly experienced

2 See Matthew 8:12, 13:42 & 50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30 and Luke 13:28.

elite financiers (*faenatores* or entrepreneurs) and/or freedmen.³ Therefore, it is possible that Jesus' audience would have assumed that the two "good and faithful" servants he was describing in this parable were freedmen, or persons of equivalent rank/status, who would have had a great deal of experience in handling investments and loans of that magnitude – and thus did not need to assign the lending activity to bankers. On the other hand, we can infer from Mathew's narrative that the "good for nothing" servant had neither the experience nor the personal network to accomplish the results expected of him by the master – and may even have had no experience of dealing with bankers who handled maritime or bottomry loans. And this begs the question as to why the master trusted him with such a large amount of money in the first place.

This is speculation on my part, but since it is widely accepted that the 'master' in the parable is meant to represent Jesus, it is therefore possible that this portrayal of a master trusting something as valuable as a 'talent' to a person who had neither the knowledge to do anything productive with it, nor the contacts to call upon for help – and the master's angry reaction when confronted with the pathetic results – is comparable in certain respects with Hebrews 10:38, which contains an analogous warning of displeasure attributed to Yahweh: i.e. "the just shall live by faith; and if he draws back and shrinks in fear, My soul has no delight or pleasure in him". Therefore, we may infer from the parable that the master was hoping that his "good for nothing" servant would step out in faith – which would have provided that servant with an opportunity to do something to change his lowly circumstances: i.e. to increase his level of prosperity and status as it were. As a consequence, the bout of intense anger depicted in the parable is what we might expect from a first-century master giving vent to his frustration and disappointment; and the punishment awarded to the "good for nothing" servant – who was afraid of not being able to accomplish the master's assigned task, and so allowed his fear to stop him even attempting to do the right thing – can therefore be deemed appropriate.

After all, the Greek word for 'sin' is ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*), which, according to Thayer's Lexicon, in Greek literature from Aeschylus and Thucydides down carried the rudimentary meaning of 'to miss the mark'. Thus, according to scripture, failure to follow instructions attributed to Yahweh (i.e. failure to meet the Master's expectations, especially if the reason for that failure is a lack of faith), would be categorised as "sin", which results in loss of "right-standing" with Him, and consequently exposes the "unrighteous" person to the form of punishment described in Matthew 25:30. However, the seemingly draconian nature

3 For an explanation of the importance and power of freedmen in the Roman economy, see Chapter 7.1, *Freedmen and their economic importance*.

of the punishment should be understood in the context of other scriptures. For example, Hebrews 5:7 (in the AMPC) explains that Christ's prayers were heard because of "His piety, in that He shrank from the horrors of separation from the bright presence of the Father"; and separation from such a "bright presence" (generated by close proximity to the divine) would presumably result in circumstances aptly described as "outer darkness" since, according to Seccombe (2022:62), "light and darkness were [...] images for the presence or absence of God".⁴ Similarly, in Psalm 51:11, when David was convicted of his sin, he cried out to God, "Cast me not away from Your presence"; and the level of anguish implied in this plea suggests a state of utter despair: i.e. a level of distress to be experienced when a servant of the 'master' is no longer in right-standing with Him, and therefore no longer enjoys the light of His "bright presence" – which would no doubt result in much "weeping and grinding of teeth".

14.3 The Parable of the Rich Fool

The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16–21) is taught widely as an example of the consequences of greed, and centres on the long-established contention held by theologians that a "surplus of prosperity" should be utilised exclusively for charitable purposes.

Thus, the argument is postulated that, instead of planning to utilise his abundant harvest purely for his own benefit, the farmer should have distributed it amongst the poor and needy. Hence, Augustine contends that the farmer was punished with "forfeiting his soul" because he was "planning to fill his soul with excessive and unnecessary feasting and *was proudly disregarding all those empty bellies of the poor*". And more recently, Hays (2010:224) has likewise argued that the rich fool "dies suddenly and incurs judgement *because he has neglected the poor*" (emphasis added). However, Luke 12:21 (KJV) explains that the punishment described in verse 20 awaits "he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"; and, according to Thayer's Lexicon, the phrase *πλουτῶν εἰς θεόν*, 'rich towards God', means 'to abound in riches made to subserve God's purposes and promote His glory'.

Therefore, with all due respect, I submit that any limiting of the definition of God's "purposes" to just acts of charity is an overly-narrow interpretation of a truly vast subject. As mentioned previously, an abundant harvest is one of the key promises of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant: e.g. Deuteronomy 28:11–12 (AMPC) promises "a surplus of prosperity, through [...] the fruit of your ground", which

4 He cites Isaiah 60:19–20.

would result in the Children of Israel being in a position to “lend to many nations” (emphasis added). As a consequence, even though this parable is meant to be a lesson on the perils of greed and unrestrained self-interest, it should also be viewed in a banking context. Furthermore, because the threat described in Luke 12:20–21 is implicitly all-inclusive in its scope, i.e. it applies to *anyone* “who continues to lay up and hoard possessions for himself and is not rich [in his relation] to God”, it means that this parable should also be understood as a cautionary tale for all the people of Yahweh who work in business and finance today.

Granted, the rich farmer’s decision to build larger barns makes it quite clear that he intended to store his surplus grain for his own use,⁵ which implies that he did not intend to employ it in a manner that would benefit others. However, traditional exegesis has ignored the possibility that one of the ways in which that surplus grain could have been used *productively* (for the benefit of others) is in the form of “loanable funds”; as we find in the ancient practice of commodity-banking. Therefore, by deliberately choosing *not* to utilise his surplus grain in this way, the rich farmer was in fact perverting one of the “divine purposes” of prosperity, as expounded in the Mosaic-Sinai covenant. Consequently, his actions would be viewed as an attempt to defraud the divine (and also deprive His people of what Yahweh had promised them),⁶ which obviously warrants the harshest of penalties: cf. the Ananias and Sapphira pericope; also Achan in Joshua 7:1–26, since these characters “kept something back” (*enosphisato* in Acts 5:2 and LXX Joshua 7:1) from either money or valuable goods dedicated to the Lord. And if the members of the primitive church understood the banking context of this parable, it would have provided them with more than enough motivation to offer their particular, post-Pentecost “surplus of prosperity” as loan-investment funds for the operation of the primitive church’s *trapeza*.

14.4 Embracing Risk for the Benefit of Others

Jesus is recorded in various scriptures as either issuing an edict or providing guidance on the subject of lending, which was sometimes a specific reference

5 Luke 12:18 in the majority of ET bibles states that the rich fool’s crop consisted of grain.

6 Interestingly, this parable is meant as a warning following on from Christ’s comment (in Luke 12:15) that people should “keep free of all covetousness”; and here the Greek word translated as ‘covetousness’ is *πλεονεξία* (*pleonexia*, ‘avarice; by implication, fraudulency, extortion’).

to the act of lending money. For instance, in Matthew 5:42, Christ is recorded as saying, “Give to him who keeps on begging from you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow [at interest] from you”. And in Luke 6:34, He remarks that, “if you lend money [at interest] to those from whom you would you hope to receive, what quality of credit and thanks is that to you? Even notorious sinners lend money [at interest] to sinners, so as to recover as much again”. He also adds the instruction in Luke 6:35 that His audience are to “lend, expecting *and* hoping for nothing in return”.

We note that the Greek δανείζω (*daneizō*) is used here for both ‘borrow’ and ‘lend’; cf. Deuteronomy 28:12, where the Hebrew לָוָה (*lāwā*) is also rendered as both ‘to lend’ (literally, ‘to cause to borrow’) and ‘to borrow’, as in “you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow”; also, the AMPC adds ‘at interest’, as advocated by Vincent (1887).⁷ So it is generally accepted that here Christ was talking about lending money, not goods. However, of particular significance is the idea that, in Luke 6:35, Christ is demanding that the lender should cast aside any form of risk assessment (i.e. ascertaining whether or not the person receiving the loan is capable of repaying it), which is a fundamental protocol in banking in any age. Instead, He appears to be saying that you must never consider whether the person is a good credit risk; only that he or she needs the money, which (according to Christ) you are obliged to lend to them.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that Christ’s words were meant to be applied in some form of all-inclusive manner. In other words, we should not interpret Matthew 5:42 and Luke 6:34–35 as implying that any Christian who needs a loan (or investment) can automatically expect to receive one from within the membership of their church congregation. Because, even though we may infer from Christ’s words that (when it comes to assessing whether “a brother in need” is a good credit risk) He wants lenders to ignore normal commercial criteria, there are implications elsewhere in scripture that certain “spiritual” criteria should be applied instead. As discussed previously, in the OT scriptures that deal with lending to a “brother in need”, e.g. Deuteronomy 15:7–8 and 23:19–20; also Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36–37, the Hebrew for “brother is” אָחִי (*‘āh*, which denotes a tribal as well as a familial relationship). Thus, the word was meant to be interpreted in the wider sense

⁷ Marvin Vincent’s *Word Studies in the New Testament* (1887). Since any loan extended to a “brother” in need (to finance personal consumption) was not permitted to carry any interest, we must therefore assume that Vincent is certain that Christ is referring here to productive loans, extended for business purposes, which are allowed to have *tokos* (or Hebrew *tarbîṭ*) attached to them. See Chapter 10.7, *The question of interest*.

as a fellow Israelite or Jew; in other words, a co-religionist. Consequently, in the modern era “brother” might be interpreted as a fellow-Christian.

However, just as the apostle Paul set out rather strict criteria (in 1 Timothy 5:9–10) for widows who deserved to receive charity from the church, it is possible that Christ also had specific criteria in mind for how to interpret the word “brother” when applied to a “brother in need”. For example, in Matthew 12:48, He poses the rhetorical question, “who are My brothers?” which He answers (in verse 50) with “whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother!” Furthermore, in Luke 8:21, Christ’s definition of “brother” is expanded to include “those who listen to the Word of God and do it!” And obviously, not everyone in the Body of Christ would meet this rather stringent set of criteria.

On the other hand, as mentioned previously, Mills (1989:2) explains that the OT teaching on lending and borrowing imposed “a strong obligation on the debtor to repay [...] Deliberate failure to repay a debt was tantamount to theft. David observes that ‘the wicked borrow and do not repay’” (Psalm 37:21). And the word “wicked” is רָשָׁע (*rāšāʿ*, ‘wicked, guilty of sin against God and man’). From this, a potential lender may take comfort in the notion that the borrower would be fearful of sinning against God, and would therefore be highly motivated to repay the loan. In addition, we note Christ’s comment in John 16:8, when He assures His disciples that, when the Holy Spirit comes,⁸ “He will convict the world of sin” (NASB). The Greek word for ‘convict’ is ἐλέγχω (*elegchō*, ‘to convict, refute, confute; by conviction to bring to the light, to expose’). This suggests that the Holy Spirit will convict any loan defaulter of his or her ‘sin against God and man’; and, if that does not work, there is the implied threat to ‘expose’ their wickedness for all to see – since the possibility of public shame was a powerful social motivator in ancient times.

Nevertheless, if a lender is wise enough to lend only to a “brother” who “listens to the Word of God and does it”, there should be no question of the loan going unpaid, since any borrower (who does the will of Our Father in heaven) will obviously do his or her utmost to obey the strict OT instructions to repay. And also, if that borrower is seeking a loan to finance a purchase or project that they believe is in accord with “the will of God”, then there is the additional implication that the project itself will also enjoy both His blessing and protection. So in essence, there is no risk involved, only faith; namely, the lender’s faith that Yahweh will keep His promises and do what He says He will do.

⁸ In John 16:13, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the ‘Spirit of Truth’.

14.5 Comment

The great tragedy here is that millions of Christians are ignorant of not just the economic context of various scripture passages (which contain the mechanics of wealth creation that are designed to improve not only their lot in life, but that of others in their community), they also do not understand and thus do not fully appreciate the true nature of the “more mundane” message to be found in familiar scriptures that traditionally have been either misinterpreted or over-spiritualised.

For example, Christ was not *anti*-bankers. Rather, He appears to be comfortable with the idea of banking and bankers, as long as they were not greedy or fraudulent – and as long as they understood that they were there to serve God and the people, and not be *self*-serving. That’s perhaps because, as mentioned previously, bankers performed a worthwhile if not “liturgical” role in ancient times. However, He wanted the crowd to appreciate that, just as the Christian life is a life of faith, banking and/or lending also requires the lender to exercise faith, or at least enough faith to progress with any projects ordained/directed by the “master”. Nevertheless, if anyone was tempted, like the rich fool, to corrupt the divine purposes of the prosperity promised in the Mosaic-Sinai covenant, He had no hesitation in informing His audience of the punishment awaiting such a perversion of “divine provision”. Finally, I suggest that it was not Christ’s intention to reprimand any lenders in the crowd about their customary lending methods. Instead, we can infer from the text that He was advocating a different approach (albeit one with a more altruistic thrust than they may have practised previously), encouraging lenders that any opportunity to lend to a (true/devout) “brother” in need should be seized without worrying about the possible consequences of a default on that loan – because He believed (and therefore preached) that Yahweh would provide both reward for a generous spirit and recompense if anything went wrong.⁹

In other words, Christ was trying to both reassure and also encourage His audience by explaining that, in economic matters, Yahweh usually adopted a “carrot *and* stick” approach – not just all “stick”.

9 In Luke 6:35, when Christ encourages the people not to be concerned about any possible risk involved when they lend, but to consider “nothing as lost and despairing of no one”, He adds the promise that “your recompense (your reward) will be great” (ὁμῶν μισθὸς ἔσται πολὺς). And since πολὺς (*polys*) means ‘much, equivalent to great, strong, intense, large’, this suggests that the lender who obeys Christ’s edict to “do good and lend” will, if there is a loan default, receive an extraordinary level of compensation from Yahweh analogous with the promise in Joel 2:25 to “restore the years of the cankerworm”.

The Modern Prosperity Gospel: Theology and Social Context in Conflict

Any argument in support of a relationship between spiritual and economic transformation is in danger of being dismissed arbitrarily as an attempt to legitimise the much maligned, so-called “prosperity gospel”, as promoted in various Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. This issue needed to be addressed at some point within this book; hence this excursus.

I will concede that the promoters of the modern prosperity gospel are promulgating a biblically-inspired message that is in line with the basic tenets of this study and with which I find significant agreement. However, biblically-inspired does not always equate with biblically-accurate. Consequently, if you sift through the literary and media output of this movement’s better known leaders and promoters you will eventually be confronted by theological issues that give rise to serious, social and/or economic problems, particularly for their lay followers. As Skinner (1963:7–8) writes, amongst the ancient people of Yahweh, “the primary subject or ‘unit’ of religion [was] the nation”. And so, when the Hebrew prophets proclaimed a message concerning the Mosaic-Sinai covenant or equivalent OT promises of divine provision and protection, they were “conscious of being intermediaries between Yahweh and the nation of Israel [...] and the message they deliver[ed] in His name [was] addressed not to themselves personally, nor to each Israelite individually, but to the nation in its corporate capacity, conceived as an organic unity”. In other words, the promises of blessings and/or curses contained in the OT salvation-restoration oracles were destined for a *collective* audience; and, as a consequence, they demanded a *collective* response – albeit one made up of a critical mass of individual decisions that, when coordinated in some way (e.g. a royal decree), created a collective will to do the right thing.

In particular, at the heart of the OT salvation-restoration oracles lies the promise that Yahweh will “restore the fortunes” of His people. As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew phrase is שְׁבֹיַת שׁוֹב (*šûb šəbûṭ*) and, according to Westermann (1991:258–259), this expression occurs 27 times in 24 OT passages. He further explains that, “In almost every instance it is a restoration of Israel’s fortunes, but in a few passages that of another people. Only once, Job 42:10, is it a restoration of the fortunes of an individual, a clearly secondary meaning”. From this statement, it is evident that any lessons to be learned from the

OT salvation-restoration oracles in general and blessing model in particular were meant to be applied – then and now – within a community setting or even larger framework.¹ On this point, I find that the modern prosperity gospel movement runs into trouble on both theological and practical grounds because, firstly, the message is usually preached or promoted in a way that is designed to appeal to individuals;² secondly, its content is absorbed and processed by individuals who have been heavily influenced by the prevailing western *zeitgeist* to believe that individualism and its attendant trait of personal ambition are permissible if not laudable;³ and, thirdly, any instructions or principles contained in the message are implemented by individuals almost exclusively on behalf of themselves or, at best, a small group with whom they are immediately associated: e.g. their family and/or employees.

Not only is this approach and underlying cultural ethos riddled with all the well-known pitfalls of individualism, they are also in conflict with one of the core principles of the new covenant, as Carroll's comment (1983:98–99) on Jeremiah 31 illustrates:

The spirituality of the individual is cradled in the religion of the community. No religious urge or spirit can survive without a superstructure of communal rituals patterned by time and place. Nor can the piety of

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- 1 Before we proceed any further, I wish to make it perfectly clear that the “community” paradigm I am advocating in this excursus has no connection whatsoever with the movement that started in North America in the 1970s called “Shepherding”, in which church members were coerced into participating in an inflexible form of community, with the pastors and elders in almost total control of the lives of the members of their congregations. In comparison, the Greek word *koinōnia* (as explained elsewhere) implies the twin notions of “contribution” and “cooperation” amongst Christians – never “control”.
 - 2 For example, in Bruce Wilkerson's book, *The Prayer of Jabez*, which has reputedly sold more than 20 million copies worldwide, readers are urged to repeat *every day* a prayer based on 1 Chronicles 4:10, which contains “me” or “my” (the personal pronoun, first person singular) five times in a single sentence. In a similar individualistic vein, the title of Joel Osteen's first book was “Your best life now”; and his weekly television programme was originally entitled “Discover the Champion in You”, and more recently, “You are stronger than you think”. However, I am not criticising what these clergy and their contemporaries have done – only what they have not done.
 - 3 Interestingly, the dominance of individualism over community within the religious life of North Americans may have its seeds in the country's Puritan heritage, since this group's theology, according to Jones (1989:174), demanded “that the *individual* be as free as possible to follow the dictates of God” (emphasis added). In fact, MacCulloch (2010:765) goes so far as to describe the individualism of the Pilgrim Fathers as “obstinate”.

the individual have any influence without a community to nourish it or provide a foil for it to develop against.⁴

And it goes without saying that virtually all economic activity also requires a community (i.e. marketplace) setting – merely in order for people to survive, let alone develop or be nourished. On that basis, the modern prosperity gospel movement faces numerous problems because, despite the fact that its message contains numerous examples of authentic OT promises of material blessing (meant for a collective audience), the messages are invariably communicated in a way that clearly appeals to individuals, and consequently elicit individualistic responses.⁵ In fact, ever since this particular message began to be communicated via the so-called mass media,⁶ the cocktail of OT theology and modern social context has become even more toxic, thanks in part to the media's own efforts in promoting the seemingly attractive, but problematic "benefits" associated with individualism.

As a consequence, the results of the modern prosperity gospel message are often fragmentary and also mixed, as one would expect from outcomes/results that depend on disparate individuals exhibiting a range of levels of spiritual maturity, wisdom, intellect and other human traits. Were we to measure a significant number of those outcomes, I would predict with some confidence that the efforts of the prosperity gospel movement would invariably produce a small number of very good results at the top end of the sample spectrum, along with a similarly small number of bad results at the bottom end. Thus, the vast majority of results would be of an average or near-average quality that, if depicted in graph form, would produce a large bulge in the middle, creating an inverted curve or bell-like shape: the ubiquitous "bell curve" phenomenon.

Now, you invariably end up with some version of the bell curve when you collate and plot a range of individual (statistical) results that are derived

4 Carroll (1981:221) also explains that "Christian commentators have tended to stress the individualism of the new covenant and to see the singling out of the individual as a major advance in religion initiated by Jeremiah [...] It needs to be emphasized, however, that the new covenant is made 'with the house of Israel and the house of Judah' (v. 31) and not with individuals. It may internalize the covenant within the minds of the individuals constituting the two communities, but this is not individualism".

5 The new covenant message preached by Peter at Pentecost was explicitly sectarian and therefore may not be seen as attempting to elicit a "collective" response. However, as mentioned previously, it promised economic benefits to the repentant individual via their entry into a community of fellow-penitents.

6 In my opinion, the phrase "mass media" should never be interpreted in the *collective* sense, since the message is transmitted via television sets, radios, computers – and also smart-phones – located in *individual* homes, etc.

from any reasonable size group in virtually any area of human endeavour or experience.⁷ However, this is the kind of result to be expected from human effort or circumstances, and obviously not what we would hope for from a religious movement that constantly promises divine intervention in the human experience. And if the majority of the results achieved by the prosperity gospel movement are indeed occurring within the range of natural, human possibilities, rather than the supernatural or divine, I would argue that this situation stems either directly or indirectly from the counterproductive impact of the perception of individualism inherent within the movement's ethos and/or communication methodology; and also the cultural environment in which its message is being preached – which is perhaps why this particular movement attracts such widespread criticism for promising more than it actually delivers.⁸

Anecdotal confirmation of the prosperity movement's less than impressive results (from a collective standpoint) was provided for me some time ago, when I was alerted to an unpublished and to date unverified statistic reputed to occur across the range of modern Christian ministry groups who preach a message calling on their followers to have faith for physical and/or financial miracles.⁹ Apparently, as admitted to me off-the-record by a Director/Trustee of a well-known, international ministry organisation, it is believed that less than 10 per cent of the hearers of a "Word of Faith" type message manage to internalise and process that message to the point where it creates a substantial, positive change in the hearer's physical or economic circumstances.¹⁰ Granted, others see some degree of improvement; however, the level of change that occurs in most cases could easily be dismissed as being derived from human

7 The bell curve is also known as the Gaussian function, named after Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777–1855), and is associated with the "normal distribution" of statistical results: e.g. the measurement of human height. See Ball (2004:49–50).

8 However, I wish to stress here that I think it is a good thing when people combine the ideas of faith and economic growth – even if they are doing so in ways that are not 100 per cent biblically-accurate.

9 In the summer of 1993, I attended a rally in Birmingham (England), organised by US tele-evangelist, Benny Hinn. Interestingly, when Hinn asked people who had come hoping for a financial miracle to stand, the number who responded was around double those who had stood a few minutes earlier when he asked the same question regarding people hoping for a physical miracle.

10 This loosely correlates with the findings of the psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1943): namely, that only a very small number of people (1½ per cent) achieve the highest level of human need-fulfilment, which he called "self-actualization". Note that this is the kind of result achieved solely via human effort.

(e.g. psychological or psychosomatic) factors rather than divine effort.¹¹ This may help explain the oft-recorded occurrences in scripture of Yahweh executing unusual and extraordinary miracles in order to secure recognition and praise for His intervention. Finally, some hearers of the faith/prosperity message see no discernible change and some even find that things get worse.

So, in a nutshell, even though the modern prosperity gospel message claims to be “biblically-based” (using scripture to validate its promises and claims), it cannot be deemed “biblically accurate” because, in its current form, it is both preached in the pulpit and processed/internalised in the pew within the wrong psychological and social context: one that is manifestly individualistic rather than community-focused. Against this, Thompson (1981:222) argues that “covenant as a community mode of living cannot be structured in terms of what individuals do; the important thing is what the community as a whole does”. Unfortunately, the prosperity movement’s attempts to operate within a larger, *pseudo*-community context (e.g. in the form of the “Religious Right”) are also theologically questionable, and have created a further layer of problems because, in grasping the greasy pole of politics, particularly national politics, this even more strident cohort of the prosperity movement has in fact added to the theological errors. After all, the Religious Right have argued consistently, for example, that the United States is a “Christian nation”. As such, their efforts emulate the OT prophets’ attempts to *reform* the so-called “national religion”, and ignore the obvious *sectarian* stratagem underpinning the new covenant – which is based on the long and well-established tradition of a devout “remnant” being blessed by Yahweh, while the rump of the “wicked generation” is left to face some kind of divine judgement.

Furthermore, much of the blame for the confusion arising from the prosperity gospel message can and therefore should be laid at the feet of the ministers and preachers within this movement, since they regularly cite their personal success and affluent lifestyles as evidence of potential covenantal blessings. In doing so, they are promoting the idea that Yahweh will bless members of the congregation/audience in the same way He has blessed them (i.e. for similar reasons and by means of a similar methodology), which I would describe as a theological half-truth, if such a thing exists. According to the terms of the OT blessing formula, if the conditions of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant are met, Yahweh will indeed pour out material blessings upon His people – at all levels

11 This is in no way a criticism of any individual’s level of faith. Nor would I think of belittling any kind of improvement in a person’s physical, mental or economic condition following the exercise of their faith. I am only describing here what the reaction would be to such results from the general (and predominantly agnostic) populace.

and in all (ethical) occupations. However, scripture shows that the way or manner in which Yahweh blesses the congregation is *not* the same way that He blesses His serving priesthood, which obviously includes members of the modern clergy. Put simply, the ancient priesthood derived personal benefit from the Mosaic-Sinai covenant in a manner that differed markedly from the lay members of the congregation, as we may infer from Numbers 18:21.

And, behold, I have given the Levites all the tithes in Israel for an inheritance in return for their service which they serve, the service of the Tent of Meeting.

Thus, according to scripture, the priesthood were to be rewarded/compensated for their service via “tithes and offerings” (i.e. donations) provided by the congregation,¹² which is patently different to the way in which the vast majority of the people of Yahweh are supposed to receive His economic/material blessing.¹³ Until the eighteenth century, which brought widespread industrialisation and increasing urbanisation, that blessing came chiefly from Yahweh’s involvement in the agro-economic process, since He was reputed, for example, to “provide seed to the sower and bread to the eater” (Isaiah 55:10 *cf.* 2 Corinthians 9:10). Today, in the majority of developed nations, less than two per cent of the workforce is involved directly in agriculture; and so the primary channel for Yahweh’s material blessing has for all intents and purposes shifted to the innumerable commercial enterprises in which His people now earn their living as participants in the local, regional and increasingly globalised economy.¹⁴

It is also worth noting that, generally speaking, the circumstances of the other OT-designated recipients of donations or charity can be subject to change to the point where they no longer require charity. For example, the poor once worked and could work again; the widows were once married and could get remarried; and the strangers could leave the town in which they were strangers

12 There were four other groups who were designated to receive charitable donations (as opposed to “tithes and offerings”): the poor, widows, orphans and transients or sojourners (“the strangers in your midst”). See Deuteronomy 10:18–19; 14:28–29; 16:11–14; 24:17–21; 26:12–13.

13 Agrell (1976:18–19) confirms the demarcation between the ancient priesthood and laity, concerning type of work and method of compensation: “The levitical priests are to live on what is offered [i.e. donations]. These men administer the cult on behalf of all the other Israelites, *who are occupied with ordinary work*” (emphasis added).

14 Deuteronomy 8:18 states that it is Yahweh Who provides “the power to get wealth”; and, according to Gesenius’ *Lexicon*, ‘to get’ is the Hebrew אָשָׂא (*‘āśā*, ‘to acquire by labour’), as in Latin, *pecuniam facere*, and Greek, ποιεῖν βίον, ‘to make a living’: e.g. riches.

and go somewhere where they were not. On the other hand, offerings/donations were designated as the *permanent* or *perpetual* source of income for the priesthood. Consequently, prosperity preachers should exercise a lot more care and perhaps even refrain from using their own experience as a testimonial of the potential benefits that the laity may derive from the OT covenant. Thus, the archetypal prosperity gospel message is, at best, confusing and, at worst, socially and economically hazardous. Left unresolved, the problems caused by the misalignment of ancient theology and modern social context have the potential for grave and wide-ranging consequences, which is exactly what has happened during the prosperity movement's relatively short history. In their misguided attempts to put the OT covenant into practice in their day-to-day lives – in the way that they have been instructed by their misguided clergy – Christian business people sometimes go bankrupt, couples get divorced, and the sick get sicker. And not only does Yahweh often get the blame, but many of the disappointed recipients of the message and/or ministry are left drowning in guilt, which is not entirely self-administered.

According to Thompson (1981:221), the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 is not a rationale for individualism, “nor is it the essence of religion which the philosopher, A. N. Whitehead defined as ‘what a man does with his own solitariness’.¹⁵ What is envisaged in the text remains essentially the core of the Deuteronomistic view of *community* religion” (emphasis added). Therefore, what needs to be done is that millions of individuals must somehow be formed and fashioned into a modern, *collective* people of Yahweh – particularly from an economic viewpoint. To achieve that, the “remnant” that has separated itself the current “crooked generation” must be organised in such a way that it becomes a truly unified community in both the spiritual *and* economic sense. However, as Skinner (1963:72) writes in his commentary on Jeremiah 31, this idea “is unfamiliar to our [modern] individualistic manner of thinking”. Also, knowing what needs to be done is not the same as knowing how to do it.

15 See Whitehead (1927:6).

The Love of Money: A Global Banking Perspective

If you control oil, you control a whole nation. If you control food, you control people. If you control money, you control the entire world.

HENRY KISSINGER¹

16.1 Introduction

Having spent a considerable amount of effort in extolling the important role that banking has to play in (biblically-based) wealth creation, I feel that it would be both academically and morally remiss of me if I did not also expose its darker side. With that in mind, I have chosen to devote a separate chapter to the subject of monetary greed in order to highlight how serious the problem has become, for the following reason. Scripture usually addresses different aspects of wealth ethics (or its absence) via a focus on the activities and actions of individual characters; whereas, avarice, or “the love of money”, as the apostle Paul called it – when given access to the all-powerful machinery of global banking – has the potential to have a global impact, and not for good. In fact, as we saw in the financial crisis of 2008, that level of avarice has the potential to cause millions of people to lose their jobs, their savings, and even their homes.

Nevertheless, according to Easterly (2002:19), “A well-functioning banking system is crucial for economic growth”. However, the accumulation of wealth in banks invariably attracts the worst sort of bankers. And, unfortunately, this toxic confluence of “the love of money” and access to a great deal of it has occurred again and again at regular intervals throughout history, and recently raised its ugly head once more in the banking scandals of 2008–2012. Therefore, I intend to examine this subject not only from a theological viewpoint, but also from a sociological-scientific and even personal perspective – since my time working in investment banking in the City of London and on Wall Street caused me to both observe and experience the effects of this insidious aspect

¹ Former US Secretary of State (1973–1977) and National Security Advisor (1969–1975).

of human nature first hand. In order to do so, I will move beyond a classic exegetical exercise in the hope that highlighting this psychological contagion and its impact on people's lives, which only gets a few brief mentions in the NT, will somehow cause theologians and others to grant it the level of attention that such a serious and widespread problem demands.

The Greek for 'love of money' is φιλάργυρία (*philargyria*), from the root words *philos* ('a friend; actively, fond) and *argyros* (from *argós*, 'shining', 'silver, the metal, in the sense of articles or coin'). In the NT, *philargyria* appears once (1 Timothy 6:10), and the descriptor φιλάργυροι (*philargyroi*, 'lovers of money' or 'covetous') twice: Luke 16:14, where Luke is describing a group of "covetous" Pharisees who had been listening to Christ explain that you cannot serve God and Mammon;² and 2 Timothy 3:2, describing how "men shall be in the last days".³ In 1 Timothy 6:10, the apostle Paul claimed that this problem was "a (not 'the') root of all evils". Furthermore, he writes that it was serious enough to cause some of his followers to "be led astray" and abandon their faith; and in the modern era, it has become serious enough (within the banking profession, especially) for people to demand both reform and government intervention.⁴

In order to examine the root causes of this problem, I have drawn upon recent studies in neuroscience and psychiatry (which are key components of behavioural economics), and have supported these sources with reports in the media covering events in the 2008 global credit crisis and its aftermath – to see whether powerful bankers (as a particular sub-set of the genus *Homo Economicus*) do indeed have some sort of physiological differential in their brain biology when compared to "reasonable" or "rational" people, which might help to explain why the dominant paradigm of modern macro-economics (i.e. rational action theory) does not work; and therefore has been "spectacularly useless", to quote one of the industry's luminaries.⁵

2 Strong's interprets *philargyros* as 'fond of silver (money), i.e. avaricious, covetous'; which is how the word is used by Sophocles, Xenophon, Plato and others.

3 1 Timothy 3:3 uses the somewhat sordid descriptor αἰσχροκερδής (*aischrokerdēs*), 'eager for base gain (greedy of filthy lucre)'.

4 Although I personally do not believe that government intervention will ever be effective for, as one astute English Member of Parliament was heard to remark, "You cannot legislate for human nature".

5 See Chapter 1.3, *The cross-discipline approach*, footnote 30.

16.2 Land of the Free, the Brave and the Greedy

Agrell (1976:82 & 172, n. 82) writes that the rabbinical literature depicts any profession that handled money as “scarcely reconcilable with a life according to God’s will” because those professions were “thought potentially to lead their practitioners to fraud”. Also, Hays (2010:32) asserts that, “So frequently does moral turpitude accompany affluence that Jewish authors came to describe wealth as an agent of corruption”. In other words, the rabbis regarded humans (the male species in particular) as being unable to resist financial temptation. Worse still, in numerous ET bibles, Isaiah 23:17 describes the trading activity of the ancient Phoenicians as a form of “prostitution” or “whoring” (the Hebrew זָנָה, *zānâ*, means ‘to commit fornication, to play the harlot’). So it seems that, in scripture and the rabbinical texts, anyone working in the financial industry is considered guilty until proven innocent.

Evidently, it is no coincidence that the vast majority of recent banking problems around the world have arisen (and apparently will continue to arise) out of North America. In his ground-breaking book, *American Mania: When More is Not Enough*, Peter Whybrow (2005)⁶ uses both psychiatry and neuroscience research findings to explain why North America was the perfect location from which to grow the global economy in the period following World War II – and why by the same token it is also perhaps the worst possible location from which to furnish some of the people who came to be in control of that global economy. He writes that human behaviour is the result of either the balance or imbalance of two key facets of the human “personality”. These are “temperament” and “character”. Essentially, *temperament* governs behaviour that comes from the physiological makeup of our brain (or the “inborn pattern of emotional style”); whereas *character* is best defined and understood as “learned behaviour”:⁷ i.e. the patterns of behaviour that we have learned either directly or indirectly from our parents, schoolteachers, church, etc. – or else acquired from personal experience.

In attempting to uncover the source of many social or, specifically, antisocial problems, various groups (such as the media, politicians, social workers, educators, clergy, etc.) have promoted the notion that these human problems can be blamed primarily on external factors: e.g. they occur as a result of people’s financial or social environment. However, Whybrow argues that, in some cases, a person’s *temperament* (i.e. the physiological makeup of their brain)

6 Peter Whybrow is the Judson Braun Distinguished Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

7 See Whybrow (2005:80).

also makes a major contribution. Put simply, our brain contains a “reward path” that is a something of a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it can be highly beneficial, in that it drives our desire to excel in acceptable pursuits, such as sports and business. However, it can also cause addictions of sorts; not just the chemical type (e.g. anything from caffeine to cocaine, etc.), but also unadulterated greed. According to Whybrow, the brain’s reward path is regulated by a balancing act of neurotransmitters; the two most relevant to this study being *serotonin* and *dopamine*.⁸ And the difference in the level of these two neurotransmitters in the brain determines the kind of behaviour we can expect in a person: either “explorer/risk-taker” types, for example, or “stay at home/risk-averse” types.

In various studies sourced for his book, Whybrow found that the global success of the economic powerhouse of North America can be attributed primarily to the contribution of its migrants. Not only have innumerable multitudes of these “explorer/risk-taker” types demonstrated a significant desire-cum-drive to leave their homeland and succeed in their new country, they also show evidence in their brains of the occurrence of a particular “allele” (i.e. a variant form of dopamine receptor); namely, D4-7, as opposed to the more ubiquitous D4-4. As Whybrow (2005:95) explains, “The 7-allele of the D4 receptor is so named because a segment of the amino-acid chain repeats itself seven times rather than four (the D4-4 allele), which is the variant of the D4 receptor most commonly found in humans”. In other words, compared to a D4-4 type person, D4-7 type individuals possess a more powerful and hard-wired drive/ambition to try new things and also to succeed. And since the D4-7 allele can be inherited, America’s success in the global business arena since World War II can be explained not only from the standpoint of the greater level of innovation demonstrated by US business and technology over the past half-century or so, but from a genetic point of view as well.⁹ However, Whybrow (2005:71) paints a somewhat dark picture of the negative side of this drive for success when he writes that:

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- 8 The reward pathway is connected to areas of the brain that control reward and memory. It begins in the ventral tegmental area, where neurons release dopamine to make you feel pleasure. The brain begins to make connections between the behaviour/activity and the pleasure, ensuring that you will repeat the behaviour.
- 9 Whybrow (2005:51) writes that “America is the quintessential migrant culture. While the United States is not the only congregation of migrant people in the world today, it is contemporary civilization’s largest. Ninety-eight per cent of Americans were either born elsewhere or were born into families that migrated to the United States in the last three centuries”.

The reward systems of every human brain – of every mammalian brain – are to a greater or lesser degree vulnerable to addictive highjacking. Thus, America's greatest asset, the curiosity and risk-taking drive of its migrant people, is potentially the nation's greatest flaw.

According to Whybrow (2005:94), neuroscientists' interest in the effects of dopamine alleles dates back to studies conducted in the 1990s by Ernest Noble,¹⁰ who "reported finding in those suffering from severe alcoholism the presence of an unusual variant, or allele, of a dopamine receptor gene [...]" Noble's work gave momentum to the idea that genetic differences make an important contribution to the behavioural spectrum of human temperament". Apparently, the D4-7 dopamine receptor not only drives the desire for success in acceptable pursuits, but also the desire for pleasure; and not just the kind of pleasure gained from good, socially-acceptable experiences, but also the "pleasure" obtained from illicit ones. Thus, humans can become "addicted" to business success in the same way that they can become addicted to drugs, whether illicit or prescribed; and, like its socially-unacceptable siblings, the addiction to business success (and the obvious monetary benefits it brings) can drive a desire, if not need, for more of the same source of "pleasure", as well as ever-greater levels of it – which in some cases cannot be controlled.

That's when the love of money mutates into an addictive obsession; hence, in 1 Timothy 6:10, it is referred to as a "craving" (in the AMPC, CSB, CJB, ESV, HCSB, NLT, OJB, RSV and VOICE); or else something "lusted after" (in the GNV and MSG). And it appears that Wall Street (and other capital markets) professionals often experience the same kind of addictive "high" that is generated by gambling, for example, when they trade stocks, commodities, derivatives, etc.¹¹ However, the prosaic word "trading" can hide a multitude of sins, since the act of buying and selling securities (especially bonds) sounds somewhat pedestrian, until we consider the level of risk involved in any given transaction. And from 1978 to 2008, those risks rapidly got bigger and bigger and bigger, to the

10 At the time, Noble was the Professor of Alcoholic Studies at the University of California in Los Angeles.

11 Interestingly, in 1998, during the crisis caused by the collapse of the US hedge fund, Long-Term Capital Management, the president of Gamblers' Anonymous suggested in a radio interview that something like *one-third* of the professionals working in the US capital markets would be categorised as being addicted to gambling – which confirmed the wide-spread criticism that Wall Street has a "casino culture". Hence, some Jewish religious institutions refuse to invest with hedge funds because they believe that the investment methods used by this category of fund managers equates to gambling, which is forbidden under rabbinical law.

point where – on both the trading floor and in the media – the word “investment” became interchangeable with “bet”: e.g. a bet on whether interest rates would go up or down, or a bet on whether a particular company was going to do well or get into trouble.

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, critics of the banks started citing the existence of “a culture of greed”,¹² driven by a kind of predatory “pack mentality” as it were. And this may sound rather simplistic; however, the basic problem with today’s banks is that they are no longer banks – not as the term is generally understood. They have instead become something else: financial powerhouses that wield too much power, or at least so much power that they can ignore public opinion and government pressure to reform. Furthermore, the problem with the vast majority of today’s global bankers is that they are not bankers per se. In fact, most of those deemed responsible for the 2008 global financial crisis would, from an operational and professional viewpoint, be classified as traders, who reached the top positions in their respective banks by making extraordinarily large profits through short-term trading gains, buying and selling shares, bonds, etc.¹³ – and not by investing in corporate growth and long-term job creation, which has been the traditional role of banks and bankers for centuries.

12 When I first went to work on Wall Street, it was explained to me by a more experienced colleague that the stock market is driven by fear and greed. According to Alan Greenspan, US Federal Reserve Chairman from 1987 to 2006, the emotional climate in America at that time went from “irrational exuberance” to “infectious greed”. Likewise, Whybrow (2005:120–123) informs us that, in the United States, by the summer of 1999, “greed and envy had become a national disease”. Thus, at some time or other, that greed has led virtually every major capital markets firm to overstep the boundaries of legality (bankers refer to it euphemistically as “pushing the envelope”) and end up the target of a formal investigation by the Securities Exchange Commission or some State Attorney General’s office.

13 For example, in 2011, John Varley, an English banker, was succeeded as chief executive of Barclays Bank by Robert Diamond, an American trader. And previously, in 1994, Richard Fuld was elevated to chief executive of Lehman Brothers, having commenced his career at the bank as a trader in Lehman’s small Denver office. Also, in 2006, Lloyd Blankfein, who began his Wall Street career at J. Aron & Company, a little-known commodities trading firm, became Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs. However, perhaps the most famous trader on Wall Street at this time was Lewis Ranieri, who rose through the ranks of Salomon Brothers to become the firm’s Vice Chairman. In 2004, Ranieri was named by *BusinessWeek* magazine as “one of the greatest innovators of the past 75 years”. But, just five years later, in 2009, he appeared on a list of 25 people who were blamed for the 2008 global financial crisis, perhaps because he was the inventor of mortgage-backed securities, which gave rise to the sub-prime mortgage crisis. See *Time* magazine, January 2009, “25 people to blame for the financial crisis”; plus *The Guardian* newspaper, January 26, 2009, “Twenty-five people at the heart of the meltdown”.

It is worth repeating: our banks are no longer banks; they have become financial powerhouses with too much power. Also, our top global bankers are no longer bankers, they are traders; and a substantial number of these *philargyroi* ('lovers of money') figured prominently in the events leading up to the 2008 global financial crisis, as well as the banking scandals of 2012. And the reason why traders have come to occupy the top and sometimes very top management positions at many of our global banks could be categorised as a victory of brawn over brains – or, as Whybrow might put it, a triumph of the brain's "reward path" over the frontal lobe reasoning part that imposes constraint. Regrettably, financial results have come to be rewarded with executive power as well as extraordinarily large bonuses because, at a particular point in the recent history of western capital markets, short-term trading activity started to contribute a far greater percentage of profits at the leading global banks than the more traditional banking activities.¹⁴

At that point, the larger banks stopped being banks that also did some trading, and turned themselves into giant trading houses that also did some banking. When that happened, the traders started to demand that they be given the top positions or else they, and the other top performers in their team, would take those huge profits to a firm that would concede to their demands. In theory, the essential difference between bankers and traders is that bankers usually attempt to *avoid* or at least *manage* risk; whereas, traders are employed specifically to *take* risks – and often do so far too much and far too often.¹⁵ Also, if you put a trader in charge of a bank, he (rarely a she) is likely to promote growth of employee numbers and operating budgets in the trading division over the banking division. This invariably increases the firm's overall appetite for higher and higher levels of risk, while simultaneously accelerating the transition from bank to trading colossus.

14 For instance, when Blankfein became chief executive of Goldman Sachs, the batch of subsidiaries he was in control of at the time provided something like 80% of the bank's earnings.

15 For further reading about the psychology of a bank's trading team, I recommend John Coates (2012). He was a successful Wall Street trader before he became a neuroscientist at Cambridge; and his book, *The hour between dog and wolf*, describes how risk-taking transforms a person's body chemistry, driving them to extremes of euphoria or stressed-out depression.

16.3 What's Wrong with Traders?

The structure of modern banking conspires against ethical business practices.

HANCOCK AND ZAHAWI, 2011:212

Reward-driven markets do not work in the way Adam Smith predicted and intended when their locus of control becomes detached from the communities they serve.¹⁶

WHYBROW, 2005:203

Whybrow argues that the human brain has been “programmed” for millennia to cope with lack and/or scarcity; and, as a consequence, modern humans are psychologically incapable of handling prosperity,¹⁷ leading to possible social as well as economic problems. He contends that, “When faced with abundance, the brain’s ancient reward pathways are difficult to suppress”¹⁸ – resulting in, for example, the common good being overruled by self-interest. On that basis, it is inevitable that problems will arise when traders (with brains containing the D4-7 allele that produces a voracious desire for bigger and better rewards from greater and greater risk-taking) are given access to the sort of mega-abundance represented by the billions of dollars inside global/universal banks, much of which is made up of ordinary people’s savings.

Sadly, it would be naïve to assume that the above-mentioned banking problems can be solved (and averted in the future) simply by removing the traders from the top positions and replacing them with bankers. Not so, since two of the scandals that surfaced in 2012 have shown that even having a banker in charge of the bank does not guarantee that problems arising from traders’ greed can be controlled. For instance, Jamie Dimon is chairman, chief executive and president of JPMorgan Chase;¹⁹ and, since 2007, he has also been a Class “A” Director (of the Board of Directors) of the New York Federal Reserve.

16 In other words, bigger is not always better – especially in the banking world. It would appear that bankers need to be closely connected to the communities they operate in so that they are constantly reminded that they are called “to *serve* at the banking-tables” (as per Acts 6:2) and not to be *self-serving*.

17 Whybrow writes (2005:106) that, “In general, humans have little experience with affluence. After generations of frugality and adjustment to scanty conditions, we are poorly equipped – especially in our physiological adaption – to handle an overload of anything”.

18 Quoted from an interview in Lewis (2011:204–205). Whybrow goes on to comment that “We have lost the ability to self-regulate, at all levels of society”.

19 Dimon was made Chief Executive Officer of JPMorgan Chase in 2005, and Chairman and President in 2006.

In other words, he is a banker's banker. Nonetheless, in mid-2012, Dimon was forced to deal with some serious damage to his bank's reputation from a \$5.8 billion bad investment when three traders in the bank's Chief Investment Office in London not only made some bad proprietary trades, but also committed fraud when they misstated the value of those trades in an attempt to hide their losses.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the summer of 2012 was equally as traumatic for Lord (Stephen) Green, former chairman of HSBC and, at that time, UK Trade and Investment Minister.²⁰ HSBC, "long seen as one of the more conservatively run and trustworthy of the financial giants based in London", according to the *New York Times*, was one of fifteen international banks under investigation that year for possible illegal manipulation of LIBOR.²¹ It also came under investigation for alleged money-laundering activity in America, Mexico, Iran, North Korea and Russia.²² The money-laundering transactions occurred between 2004 and 2010, while Green was first chief executive (2003–2006) and then chairman of the bank (2006–2010). In November 2012, the bank announced that it had earmarked a total of \$1.5 billion to cover potential fines, settlements and other expenses related to these investigations. The figure eventually agreed upon was a record \$1.92 billion. In a TV interview in 2012, Lord Green argued that the banking industry is not corrupt and that it is wrong to "tarnish" the reputations of all the hundreds of thousands of people working in banking just because of a few dishonest people. However, the numerous banking scandals that followed the 2008 global financial crisis would suggest that the love of money was not restricted to just "a few".

16.4 The Need for 'Priest-Bankers' Today

In the language of brain biology, it is predictable that during times of great abundance, unless the prudence of frontal lobe reasoning imposes collective constraint through cultural agreement, human social behavior

20 Green joined the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in 1982; and in 1992 was appointed to the Board of HSBC Holdings plc as Executive Director of Investment Banking and Markets.

21 LIBOR stands for the London Interbank Overnight Rate and is a benchmark used by international banks for setting interest rates.

22 The 355-page US Senate report claimed, amongst other things, that HSBC had been "used by Mexican drug cartels looking to get cash back into the United States, by Saudi Arabian banks that needed access to dollars despite their terrorist ties, and by Iranians who wanted to circumvent United States sanctions".

will run away to greed as the brain's ancient centres of self-preservation engage in a frenzy of self-reward.

WHYBROW, 2005:253

Fortunately, even though the love of money might be “hard-wired” into human brain centres, it is sometimes possible to overcome the kind of problems associated with this level of greed, and that is when the potentially addictive tendencies of a person’s “temperament” are constrained (or kept in check) by “character”: i.e. learned behaviour.²³

In Philippians 4:11, the apostle Paul wrote: “*I have learned how to be content in whatever state I am*” (emphasis added). And in verse 12 he explains that one of the reasons why he was able to do so is because he had experienced living in both abased (humble and straitened) as well as abundant circumstances.²⁴ In verse 11, *μανθάνω* (*manthanō*) means ‘to learn by use and practice’; and *αὐτάρκης* (*autarkēs*) means ‘to be contented with one’s lot, with one’s means’. But how did this process work? In Romans 5:3–4, Paul also wrote, “pressure and affliction and hardship [e.g. living in humble and straitened circumstances] produce patient and unswerving endurance. And endurance (fortitude) develops maturity of character”. Thus, it is perhaps stating the obvious to say that “contentment”, which will only occur if the brain’s reward path is prevented from being hijacked by some sort of D4-7 induced “addictive desire”, such as the love of money, is undoubtedly an outcome of mature human *character* (or “moral disposition”)²⁵ – and thus a product of *learned* behaviour – that is invariably developed through patient endurance. Therefore, if we hope to overcome the deficiencies in our human temperament, it will not happen either instantly

23 According to Whybrow (2005:37), “Selfish behaviors are reward driven and innate, wired deeply into the survival mechanisms of the primitive brain, and when consistently reinforced, they will run away to greed, with its associated craving for money, food or power. On the other hand, the self-restraint and empathy for others that are so important in fostering mental health are *learned behaviors* (emphasis added) – largely functions of the new human cortex and thus culturally dependent”.

24 Whybrow (2005:226) writes that, in *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith recognized that “both the prudent management of one’s own affairs and benevolence towards others are *learned behaviors*” (emphasis added).

25 In Hebrews 13:5, the AMPC refers to “character” as “moral disposition”, and the writer urges his readers to “Let your character *or* moral disposition be *free from love of money* (ἀφιλάργυρος, *aphilargyros*: ‘without covetousness’) [including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions] and be satisfied with your present [circumstances and with what you have]”.

or easily because, not only does it take time, it also takes a great deal of mental discipline.²⁶

Obviously, the opposite of being content is being discontent – something I consider perhaps to be the greatest of all “sins”,²⁷ which may sound a bit far-fetched. But then, consider the following extract from the Westminster Shorter Catechism,²⁸ in which some important questions have been posed that I believe are relevant to this study.

Q. 79. Which is the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment is, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour’s”.

Q. 80. What is required in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.

Q. 81. What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment forbiddeth all *discontentment* with our own estate (emphasis added), envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.

Thus, I would argue that “covetousness” (and, interestingly, ‘covetous’ is an alternative rendering of *philargyroi*) is mentioned at the end of the list of commandments for the reason that coveting is driven by discontent – and discontent (of God’s place in our life and our lot in life generally) is the basis of all the

26 The various scriptures that urge us to develop “patient endurance” and mature character are Luke 21:19, Romans 5:3 & 15:4–5, Hebrews 6:12, 10:36 & 12:1.

27 One could even argue that discontent was the basis of the so-called “original” sin. After all, speaking hypothetically, it is possible that Eve would *not* have succumbed to the serpent’s temptations if she had been content with what Yahweh had provided for her and her husband, Adam.

28 The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a catechism written in 1646–1647 by the Westminster Assembly, a synod of English and Scottish theologians and laymen intended to bring the Church of England into greater conformity with the Church of Scotland.

unacceptable or problematic behaviour that the other nine commandments are designed to control or eradicate.²⁹

Neuroscience may look positively on the presence of the dopamine allele D4-7 in the human brain, ascribing to it favourable characteristics such as “novelty” and “risk-taking”. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to ignore the darker side of this facet of brain biology, since the pursuit of “novelty” can mask a person’s discontent with their current situation, and might therefore be driven by covetousness. Also, “risk-taking” becomes dangerous if the person concerned does not care about the impact of those risks in other people’s lives. In fact, it is perhaps no coincidence that, in 1 Timothy 6:10, the apostle Paul describes the “love of money” as a craving that has caused some people to be led astray and wander from the faith – turning from service to God and choosing instead ‘to be a slave’ (*douleuō*) of mammon. Thus, the *learned* behaviours of self-restraint and empathy are needed to keep the “sin” of avarice in check, especially when there are large amounts of money involved: e.g. in banking.

Interestingly, the Jesuits require something like 13 to 15 years of what they call “formation” before a novice is allowed to take his vows as a Soldier of Christ. From this we may infer that this particular priestly order believes and also practices the idea that maturity of *character* (which is a result of *learned* behaviour) is necessary to overcome the flaws within human *temperament* – which obviously cannot be wholly trusted. As we read in Acts 6:2, the key qualities that the apostles were looking for in the men they wanted to “assign to look after this business” – namely, to serve at the “banking-tables” – were *proven* “good and attested character [i.e. *learned behaviour*] and repute, and [being] full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom”. In effect, the attributes listed in this verse correspond to a certain extent with the corporate characteristics of an *haute banque*, as defined by English merchant banker, Siegmund Warburg; namely, “moral standing, efficiency, connections, capital and high quality personnel”.³⁰

Unfortunately, as the world has witnessed to its detriment, without the primary characteristic of “moral standing” (or *proven* “good and attested character”), the other corporate characteristics of banking at even the highest level soon become perverted. And that is one of the reasons why there is a need to restore the liturgical role of “priest-bankers”.

29 For example, if you “go after other gods” it means that you are discontent with the lordship of Yahweh; if you steal, you are discontent with Yahweh’s provision for you; if you commit adultery, you are discontent with your spouse, etc., etc.

30 Cited in Ferguson (2010:240).

Summation

The promise of economic prosperity that we encounter, for example, within the OT salvation-restoration oracles (which invariably contain the “grain, oil and new wine” motif) is a major component of ancient Jewish tradition, commencing with the Mosaic-Sinai covenant. And the fact that the academic literature contains so much scholarly argument concerning the involvement of “later hands” in the chronicling of this theme in no way detracts from its significance. On the contrary, the amount of possible editorial activity only serves to confirm just how important it was considered at the time.

Unfortunately, the way in which our new covenant theology has evolved over the centuries has resulted in a form of over-spiritualisation that ignores the relevance of certain key external features of the old covenant: its economic component in particular. As a result, the powerful OT salvation-restoration oracle has been demoted to one of salvation-only and thus stripped of something akin to half of its potency and potential for good. However, even though our theology may have changed, I would argue that, in some ways, the people of Yahweh have not; and so much of the content of the tirades delivered by prophets like Hosea, Jeremiah, Joel and Ezekiel remains relevant for Judeo-Christian audiences in the twenty-first century. For example, I suggest that Hosea’s description of Yahweh’s displeasure that Israel “has not noticed, understood, or realized that it was [the Lord God] Who gave [them] the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and Who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal” (Hosea 2:8) would be suitable for use as a sermon text today.

After all, if it is indeed Yahweh who gives us “the power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18), which we subsequently offer to (i.e. lay at the feet of) the “high priests” of the modern banking system – in the form of our savings and investments – then it could be argued that the people of Yahweh are continuing to take the silver and gold that He has lavished upon them, and are thus using it “for (the benefit of) Baal”. Consequently, it would appear that the modern Christian church (and modern Jewry too, no doubt) is as guilty today of a schizophrenic religion as the people of Judah were in the time of Jeremiah, all those centuries ago. Without a proper appreciation of Yahweh’s involvement in their “daily provision”, innumerable Jews and Christians continue to turn, whether knowingly or not, to a contemporary, albeit secularised version of Ba’al Hadad in order to secure the non-agrarian variety of abundant harvests,

whatever that might look like. Thus, in place of what the ancients called “Baal” and Christ referred to as “mammon”, the people of Yahweh now look to say “the marketplace” or “the markets” – and, in some cases, even “the government” – for their economic well-being and/or success. And so the Baal-Yahweh polemic can never be totally consigned to history, since the fundamental reasons for its original existence continue to confront us even today; and, because of human nature, may never cease to do so.

Also of interest is the fact that the OT salvation-restoration oracles were often proclaimed at a time when the people of Yahweh were being oppressed by a foreign power: e.g. the Assyrians during the time of Isaiah, and the Babylonians during the time of Jeremiah. Likewise, Peter’s Pentecost sermon – with its reference to the prophet Joel, and implicit promise of economic prosperity for those who repented – was preached when Palestine was occupied by the Romans, which also coincided with a period of local rule by a corrupt oligarchy consisting of the Herodian monarchy and Sadducee elite. Thus, we see that prosperity was offered/proclaimed and also understood not only as a solution to the endemic economic problem of lack or scarcity, but also as part of a (reputedly) divinely-orchestrated antidote to various forms of socio-political oppression.¹ For example, in Isaiah 10:27, the promise of ‘fatness’ (Hebrew: *šemen*, which also means ‘anointing’, as well as ‘prosperity’;² thus implying a combination of spiritual empowerment *and* economic regeneration/abundance) is not only intended as a reward for repentance and renewed obedience to the Mosaic-Sinai law, but also as a method of destroying “the yoke” of oppression;³ in this instance, from the Assyrians.

1 Easterly (2006:109) argues that the solution to social and political oppression relies on economic growth amongst the middle classes: a category of person that figures prominently in the demographics of the primitive church in Jerusalem. He cites different cross-country studies to show that “the incidence of democracy [is found] to be higher in more societies with a higher share of income going to the middle class”; and specifically mentions Landes (1998: 217–218), who argues that “a relatively large middle class” is the basis for the “ideal growth and development society”. Furthermore, a comment by Bogaert (1985:82–83) regarding “the somewhat democratic nature of banking in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt”, as attested by the values of the cheques and payment orders found there, implies that banking has a part to play in helping to “destroy the yoke” of oppression.

2 In Isaiah 10:27, *šemen* is rendered as ‘fatness’ (in the ASV, AMPC, NASB, HCSB and OJB); ‘anointing’ (KJV, DARBY, GNV, NKJV, WEB); ‘oil’ (DRA, EXB, KNOX); also ‘prosperity’ (CJB, YLT).

3 In the OT, ‘yoke’ (Hebrew: *ʾol*, *ʾol*) is mostly used figuratively of servitude; thus, the phrase, ‘break the yoke’, is interpreted as the removal of an oppressor in Leviticus 26:13; Isaiah 10:27, 14:25; Jeremiah 2:20, 28:4, 30:8; Ezekiel 30:18, 34:27; plus Nahum 1:13. Of particular interest, in the CJB and YLT, Isaiah 10:27 is rendered as “the yoke [of oppression] will be destroyed *by your prosperity*” (emphasis added).

On that basis, the OT salvation-restoration oracles remain significant for the people of Yahweh in the present age for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of church growth is currently occurring in countries where much of the population is living below the poverty line.⁴ And secondly, according to a 2002 report submitted by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to the United Nations Commission for Human Rights (UNCHR), Christians are the largest religious group in the world suffering oppression and persecution for their faith; an estimated 200 million in number.⁵ However, in stark contrast to this troubling state of affairs is the intriguing (and also inspiring) possibility that, in the first century CE, the primitive church experienced first-hand the fulfilment of Yahweh's promise (in scripture) to pour out "grain, oil and new wine" alongside the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, we can infer from this that the Christian church started life as a community that demonstrated significant power in both the spiritual *and* economic realms; and, despite what we have been led to believe by traditional exegesis, their core economic model was based primarily on growth and not redistribution, although charity would have been evident. Sadly, the only place where we might find even part of this scenario in evidence today is among Pentecostal-Charismatic adherents of the modern prosperity gospel who, I contend, practice an aberrant mutation of the ancient salvation-restoration model that has grown out of a misguided and unsound mix of OT theology and modern social context. This biblically-inspired but biblically-inaccurate mutation has not only taken hold in America and parts of Europe, but also amongst Christians in less developed/lower income countries, particularly in Africa. But then, any gospel that promises to help alleviate poverty, even one that is based on a misapplication of scripture, represents the kind of "good news" that the *ptôchoi* of the world find impossible to resist.

As argued above, when Peter preached his Pentecost sermon, it is highly likely that his Jewish audience would have been thinking about Joel while they were hearing about Jesus. But was the promise of economic regeneration actually fulfilled in tandem with the spiritual transformation that commenced on

4 As mentioned previously, we learn from Easterly (2006:109) that poor peasants are much easier to repress with force than the richer, middle classes.

5 In 2002, the WEA submitted a report to the UNCHR in which they estimated that "there are more than 200 million Christians in the world today who do not have full human rights as defined by the UN Declaration of Human Rights, simply because they are Christians. They are victims of disinformation, discrimination, and persecution. [The WEA] believe that this is the largest group in the world without full human rights because of their beliefs". The report is available online at http://www.membercare.org/images/growingedge/wea_geneva_report2002.pdf; accessed May 14th 2009.

the Day of Pentecost? Granted, much of the evidence presented in this treatise might be considered circumstantial, but the implications are most decidedly in the affirmative. Moreover, when viewed through an economic lens, Luke's text appears to support this argument with the possibility that the persecution experienced by the primitive church (in particular, the Hellenist members of the congregation and more specifically the Hellenist *trapezitai*) was motivated primarily by economic factors, and driven by the Sadducee elite's fear concerning the erosion of their economic and political powerbase. Unfortunately, this particular episode of economic transformation only lasted for a period of between three to three and a half years. Nevertheless, it would appear that the validity and potency of the OT salvation-restoration model did not cease with the closure of the primitive church's *trapeza*, and the departure from Jerusalem of the surviving *trapezitai*.

In fact, the results of the simple survey described in Appendix 3 suggest that the OT promises linking economic restoration and spiritual regeneration were still being fulfilled in some fashion during the modern era: e.g. between 1782 and 1973 – even though it is doubtful that the people of Yahweh living during this period had the microeconomic genius to take full advantage of any macroeconomic stratagems mentioned in scripture. But then, we could not expect them to take advantage of stratagems they knew nothing about, and which their theological traditions had not prepared them to recognise, let alone expect. This study has also shown that an economic lens applied to the text of Acts provides answers to a number of previously unresolved exegetical issues and/or questions. However, those answers demand that we continue our quest and learn how to leverage biblically-based, faith-driven economic practices and principles, in order to apply them to the problems that plague many of the people of Yahweh around the world today. Thus, more research is called for in this nascent area of study. But, having said that, such research holds the promise of being quite fruitful, both from an intellectual and a practical perspective.

Finally, I have spent a lot of time and effort considering the part that banking (or some form of "trapezitic business") played in various plans ascribed to Yahweh down through the ages because, as Easterly (2002:19) comments: "A well-functioning banking system is crucial for economic growth". Therefore, I would recommend that any further research into the practical application of biblically-based economic practices and principles should always include some sort of banking component. After all, we have evidence of banking facilities being operated by numerous ancient religions: e.g. in the temples of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome and Jerusalem – and also, as I argue, within the primitive church community. However, for some reason, bankers have been

excluded from any significant participation in the leadership of the new temple made of living stones. Thus, somewhat perversely, it is secular economic institutions and “fundamentally atheistic” professionals who appear to have expressed the greatest interest in the marriage of faith and economic activity today. Understandably, their interest is thinly-veiled self-interest and also of a strictly secular nature: i.e. an attempt to find a more efficient and less corrupt model for deploying aid and development funding. Nevertheless, it is a starting point.

In the end, however, politicians and bankers would no doubt prefer to deal with bankers rather than clerics. Therefore, in order to move the dialogue forward in the most productive manner, Judeo-Christian groups in general and faith-based aid/development organisations in particular need to learn more about the modern role of priest-bankers, based on the characterisations of the patriarch Joseph, various Levites, Joseph-Barnabas, Stephen, Philip and the other Hellenist *trapezitai*. Likewise, if the people of Yahweh ever hope to experience the full range of benefits promised within the new covenant, and thus replicate all the conditions enjoyed by the primitive church, they will need not only to rethink and redefine the economic activities of that first-century community, but also select from among the present, global multitude, “men [and women] of good and attested character and repute, full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom, whom we may assign to look after this business” – or at least train up a new generation to do so.

But more importantly, in order to actually have any “business” (*chreia*) to look after, clergy, evangelists, mission workers et al will need to reinstate the full salvation-restoration model within the current message of salvation-only.

Appendices



Lukan Wealth Ethics: A Few Scholarly Views

A1.1 Introduction

One of the apparent problems that scholars have with the third gospel and Acts, which has yet to be fully resolved, concerns Luke's treatment of money and possessions.

Put simply, his treatment of the subject of wealth ethics (i.e. the proper use of wealth and possessions) is regarded as being inconsistent and even contradictory, since some passages appear to demand complete divestiture of possessions while others seem to permit giving away less than all. Also, there are passages where Jesus recommends almsgiving, whereas Acts appears to advocate a community (sharing) of goods. In line with my central thesis, I would argue that any scholarly confusion regarding Luke's approach stems in part from the traditional, one-dimensional (i.e. charity-only) interpretation of certain passages in Acts that should be rendered as describing "more mundane" (or overtly commercial) activities. That said, since the corpus of works in this area is enormous, to the point of being unwieldy, in this section I propose to concentrate on just three authors: firstly, Rachel Coleman and Christopher Hays, who have attempted to solve the above-mentioned hermeneutic dilemma; also David Seccombe, because of his interesting research on "the poor" in Luke.

A1.2 Rachel Coleman: Reversal and Right Response?

In her book, *The Lukan lens on wealth and possessions*, Coleman attempts to argue the case for a consistent Lukan perspective on wealth, through the twin themes of "reversal" and "right response".

She writes (2020:153) that, "for Luke, the motif of wealth and possessions is intimately connected with the Lukan theme of reversal, which is a principal way that God's saving work is presented [...] It is clear that Luke sees some kind of upheaval taking place in human existence as the salvation of God is realized in the person of Jesus. At least part of that disturbance of the status quo has to do with economic issues". Hence, her characterisation of "reversal" is primarily socio-economic in nature, and is derived in part from her interpretation of the 'Magnificat' (Luke 1:52–53), in which "the powerful [are] brought down, the lowly lifted up, the hungry fed, and the rich sent away empty". However, against this, Seccombe (2022:88) maintains that "there is nothing in the Magnificat to justify speaking of Luke as a champion of the cause of the lower classes, nor to indicate any antipathy on his part towards the well-to-do".

In the explanation of her ancillary theme of “right response”, Coleman reinforces her “reversal” theory by claiming that Luke’s gospel portrays “a series of portraits of faithful responders, all of whom are representatives of the poor, the lowly, and the despised (women, the shepherds, Simeon, crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers). Those who respond positively to God’s new work are either economically poor or status-poor, or both. The representatives of the elite (Herod, Caesar, Quirinius, and Pilate) are simply left on the margins of the narrative, peripheral to the action of the story”.

A1.3 Christopher Hays: Renunciation of All?

In Hays’ book, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics*, he too attempts to show that Luke’s treatment of money and possessions is *not* as inconsistent and incoherent as widely perceived. He lays the groundwork for his argument both carefully and thoroughly by first cataloguing various authors’ attempts to fit Luke’s approach into one of the following four categories of possible solutions:

- a) The “literary” solution, as reasoned by Gerd Theissen, Wolfgang Stegemann and Friedrich Willem Horn, which accounts for any apparent contradictions by arguing that Luke has uncritically reproduced source material with which he does not agree.
- b) The “interim” solution, as presented by David Seccombe and Vincenzo Petracca, which proposes that Jesus’ demands for total divestiture pertain only to the period of Jesus’ ministry.
- c) The “bi-vocational” solution, as offered by Hans-Joachim Degenhardt, Hans Josef Klauk and Kyoung-Jim Kim, which views Luke’s inconsistency as a result of the differences between the demands made on “itinerant” and “stationary” disciples; and finally
- d) The “personalist” solution, as proposed by Luke Timothy Johnson and Hans-Georg Gradl, in which a person’s use of possessions is determined by their response to Christ’s calling upon their life.

Interestingly, Hays opts for a modified version of the bi-vocational solution, arguing that (in the Gospel) Lukan wealth ethics are built on the coherent principle of “renunciation of all”, which is expressed in a variety of forms that depend upon a person’s wealth and vocation. He also trawls through various passages in Acts to show that Luke’s account of the primitive church describes how the Jerusalem community lived out the teachings of Christ through the “sharing” of their possessions to meet the needs of the poor, rather than the more traditional Jewish model of alms-giving.

A1.4 Comment

First of all, I find it interesting to read Seccombe's argument (2022:230) that there is only "The *appearance* of contradiction [in Luke's gospel, which] is due on the one hand to our unfamiliarity with Jewish and Hellenistic thought forms and on the other to an over-readiness to make direct ethical applications of materials which Luke presents in such a way as to demand a more subtle and thoughtful application" (emphasis added). And while I admire Coleman's and Hays' depth of research, I am concerned about the narrowness of its focus. In fact, I might even go so far as to suggest that they have a blinkered view of the subject of wealth ethics, which includes their categorisation (or, to be precise, their mis-categorisation) of "the poor". Take for instance, Christ's statements in Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the good news to the poor"; also Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you poor, for the kingdom of God is yours"; as well as Luke 7:22, "the poor have the good news preached to them".

Coleman (2020:50) informs us that, "Within first-century Judaism, 'good news to the poor' was understood to mean 'good news to Israel'", citing David Seccombe who contends that, "'the poor' of whom the Gospel speaks are the nation of Israel in need of religious redemption and political deliverance". According to Coleman (2020:49, n. 124):

Seccombe argues persuasively that the umbrella term *πτωχός* [*ptōchos*] and all the subcategorisations of it (both here and throughout Luke's Gospel) must be understood in terms of its Isaianic background [...] Seccombe sees each major division of the Book of Isaiah presenting a separate use of 'poor': 'the peasants of the pre-exilic period being squeezed off their lands by the rich and powerful, the captives of the exile, and the dispirited nation of the restoration.' Because Luke's citation comes from the third section of Isaiah, Seccombe argues that the programmatic use of *πτωχοί* in Luke 4:18 must refer exclusively to 'the nation Israel suffering and in great need'.

Seccombe claims (2022:36) that Luke 4:18, 6:20 and 7:22 are interrelated and arise from a common OT prophecy; namely, Isaiah 61:1. And his reference sources for this "poor Israel" theme include the OT, NT, OT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Classical literature and rabbinic writings. In particular, he suggests (2022:28) that "the dominant idea behind the poverty vocabulary of the Psalms is need, most frequently the need which arises from the attacks of enemies".¹ This interpretation of *ptōchos*, which depicts a people who have experienced political and/or economic

1 Seccombe's references are Psalms 9, 21, 74:19, 76:9, 149:4; also 102:17, 132:15 and 147:6.

“oppression”, is compatible with Thayer’s definition: ‘destitute of wealth, influence, position, honors; lowly, afflicted’; also, ‘to be thoroughly frightened, to cower down or hide oneself for fear; hence, properly, one who slinks and crouches), often involving the idea of roving about in wretchedness’; but *it always had a bad sense* till it was ennobled in the Gospels’ (emphasis added). And Christ’s audience would have been well aware of the political and economic oppression that their forebears had experienced, and which they were also experiencing – both personally and as a nation.

After all, at the time of Christ, the people of Yahweh had been invaded and/or governed by different nations for something like eight centuries: ever since the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 772 BCE. A century or so later, in 586 BCE, Judea was conquered by the Babylonians and, in 538 BCE, subsequently became a vassal state of the Achaemenid Empire, which in turn was conquered by the Macedonians in 332 BCE. Then from 312 to 165 BCE, Judah was ruled by the Seleucids until the Maccabean revolt, when the Hasmoneans subsequently replaced the Levitical priesthood with their own priestly aristocracy, many of whom were corrupt. Finally, the nation came under Roman rule in 64 BCE and, during the period under review, the people were also suffering under the corrupt Herodian monarchy, who originated from Idumea (ancient Edom).

The ramifications of Seccombe’s argument (backed by its literary sources) are far too important to be ignored, and therefore deserve serious investigation; however, Coleman brushes the point aside in order to keep the focus on the “reversal” component of her thesis. Thankfully, she notes the fact that *ptōchos* (‘poor’) does not appear in Acts; however, she writes (2020:150) that “‘Poor’ is replaced by words like ‘needy’ (ἐνδεής),” which is not strictly accurate because it can be argued that, in Acts 4:34, Luke is not using ἐνδεής in the *absolute* sense (‘in need, indigent’) but in the *comparative* sense (‘deficient, wanting, unequal’), which in classical Greek literature is used in discussions of the activities of elites, cities and armies.² In that context, you cannot assume that Luke’s is using *endeēs* to equate to *ptōchos*. And since Acts 4:34 represents the only use of ἐνδεής in the entire NT, Coleman should have considered other literary sources to discover the appropriate context for Luke’s usage of this word. But unfortunately, she did not.

The word *ptōchos* appears nine times in Luke’s gospel (the tenth mention of “poor” in Luke 21:2, the ‘poor’ widow at the Jerusalem temple, is rendered from *penichros*, which refers to a distinctly different economic category of person).³ And, according to Seccombe (2022:28), “one gains the impression from Deuteronomy 15:7–11 that

2 For example, Herodotus (*Histories*, 1.32 & 7.48), Plato (*Republic*, 369b), Antiphon (*Herodes*, 5.77), Xenophon (*Hellenica*, 6.1.3), Plato (*Laws*, 697e), Thucydides (*Peloponnesian Wars*, 1.10.3) and Isocrates (*Panegyricus*, 4.105).

3 See Countryman (1980:25), cited in Chapter 8.3, *No needy person among them*.

even a landed Israelite could be considered poor (*'ebion*, *'ani*) if he fell into financial need".⁴ Hence, Seccombe's "poor Israel" categorisation would appear relevant for all classes of the people of Yahweh at the time that Christ was preaching His message of "good news to the poor", which obviously is at odds with Coleman's hypothesis in which she argues that every one of Luke's mentions of "the poor" depicts persons of low, and sometimes indigent status. Consequently, I have problems with the "reversal" part of Coleman's theme, and Seccombe (2022:102) concurs that, "A general concept of 'reversal' is not to be found in [Luke 4:18, 6:20 and 7:22]. The impression that Luke is propounding such a notion is based on a failure to appreciate Jewish soteriological imagery with its contrasting characterization of Israel and the nations". Therefore, I suggest that the idea of "restoration" would be more appropriate. And so, Christ's statements and promises (concerning "poor Israel") could and therefore should be viewed as an extension of the OT restoration-salvation oracles; and, interestingly, Seccombe (2022:82) appears to offer support for this when he writes that, "Luke 1:54a is an affirmation that God has fulfilled the Isaianic hope of *salvation* and *restoration* of the people" (emphasis added).

Also, I would argue that, when interpreting the words of Christ here, we have to take the impact of location into account. Christ spent almost all of His ministry period outside of Jerusalem. Therefore, His predominantly rural audience would have been accustomed to hearing stories and anecdotes concerning absentee elite land owners, good and bad stewards, mistreated and impoverished agricultural labourers, along with other rural themes. Consequently, those listening to Christ would have recognised in His words examples of the kind of corruption and oppression they had either observed or experienced on a regular basis. Therefore, we cannot assume – as Coleman suggests – that Christ was communicating a new "social revision" paradigm solely on the basis of the choice of characters in His messages. Besides, it is possible to argue that Christ was merely doing what all good communicators do: namely, adapting the content of His messages to match the particular life experience and attendant level of understanding of His audience.⁵ And if His messages mentioned "outcasts", to use Coleman's descriptor, it could also be argued that He was being inclusive, and not necessarily revisionist. For, as Seccombe (2022:101) further argues, "There is nothing socio-economic or socio-religious about Luke's use of 'poor' terminology in [Luke 4:18, 6:20 and 7:22]. To seek to ground a liberation theology, or an ethic of poverty, upon these texts would be to misunderstand and misuse them".

4 He cites Cornelis Van Leeuwen, *Le développement du sens social en Israël avant l'ère chrétienne* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1955) p. 71.

5 When I first arrived in England, I was informed that 90 per cent of all videotapes sold in that country at that time were aimed at (if not created for) the working class market. That was not the result of any "revisionist paradigm", merely the consequence of a calculated marketing/communications programme.

Finally, amongst other criticisms, I suggest that Coleman's concluding paragraph is a little too melodramatic and guilt-inducing in its moralising. She writes (2020:161) that:

Right response to God's in-breaking kingdom includes a right use of material possessions: to meet the needs of the poor. The two-volume Lukan narrative presents no middle ground for followers of Jesus in their relationship with wealth and possessions: either they will hold them lightly, with a constant disposition to make them available for meeting the needs of the poor, or they will clutch them tightly and thus reveal the lordship of mammon rather than that of Jesus in their lives.

Thus, Coleman seems unwilling to accept any possibility of a proper use for a "surplus of prosperity" other than giving it away to the poor. Against this, I would argue that, if charity and/or sharing did indeed represent the full extent of the economic life of the primitive church, then the Sadducee elite would not have regarded the Hellenist Jesus-Believers as a serious threat to their economic powerbase; and those *Hellēnistae* would not have experienced the level of persecution we find recorded in Acts.

Christ talked about the kingdom of God often, even to the point of claiming that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15), and all He asked His audience to do to become part of that kingdom was to "Repent", which again is consistent with the OT salvation-restoration paradigm. Therefore, if the primitive church did indeed experience the outpouring of "corn, oil and new wine" in tandem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that occurred at Pentecost, then Christ's promise to "poor Israel" was fulfilled within a relatively short period of time, since those who repented would have received the kind of economic "blessing" associated with the promise of the kingdom of God *whilst on earth* – namely, in the post-Pentecost period (*cf.* Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27, 13:29). And that is perhaps why Luke had no reason to resort to the use of *ptōchos* in Acts.

Moving on, let's look at the four possible "solutions" put forward to solve the issue of possible contradictions and lack of cohesion in Luke's approach to wealth ethics. Hays rejects the "literary" solution and I tend to agree with him that someone who wrote Luke-Acts, "after having searched out diligently and followed all things closely and traced accurately the course from the highest to the minutest detail" (Luke 1:3–4), could not possibly be guilty of any kind of slapdash or *laissez faire* approach towards their sources. On the other hand, I find some merit in all three of the remaining possible "solutions". For example, with regard to the "interim" solution, I would imagine that there would be numerous young people in Christendom even today who would have no problem whatsoever "renouncing all" (i.e. leaving behind their career, home,

friends, etc.) if a preacher who could (a) regularly attract thousands and thousands of people to his (or her) meetings, (b) constantly perform extraordinary miracles, even to the point of raising the dead, and also had (c) a cadre of wealthy people supporting his (or her) ministry financially, plus (d) high-level doors open to them everywhere they went, asked them to leave everything behind in order to join their senior ministry team. However, once that exceptional, charismatic leader was no longer on the scene, and no longer available to deliver that extraordinary and impressive level of “outcomes” or “events”, it is then highly likely that – in order to maintain or increase the momentum of the late preacher’s ministry – the call to “renounce all” would be in need of some “tweaking” or modification, as the number of people willing to do so (or having the incentive to do so) would contract drastically. Thus, the “interim” solution cannot be dismissed easily.

Also, the “bi-vocational” solution makes sense, in principle at least. You just have to ignore the label given to it and appreciate that, amongst those who called themselves “disciples”, there was (and would be today) a very small minority who could psychologically handle the level of faith required to do what Jesus was asking – and a very large proportion who could not. Thus, Hays’ categorisation of “itinerant” versus “stationary” disciples is a misrepresentation of the text since, according to Seccombe (2022:15–16), the word “*mathētai* (μαθηταί, ‘disciples’) in Luke denotes a wider group than the semi-professional band that followed Jesus on the road”. On the other hand, I agree with Seccombe’s suggestion (2022:110, 119) of a difference between “disciples” and (in his words) “*true* disciples”. In fact, the level of faith required to leave everything behind should be classified as extraordinary, if not “supernatural”: i.e. a gift of the Holy Spirit, “*distributed to each one as [the Spirit] wills*” (1 Corinthians 12:11, emphasis added), which means that not every follower of Christ will possess it. And finally, there is the “personalist” solution, which has something in common with both the “interim” and “bi-vocational” solutions, since the greater the depth of relationship a person has with Christ, the more faith they will have to believe that He will look after all their needs, no matter what He asks them to do.

I also have problems with the way Hays develops the notion of “renunciation of all” – no matter how he qualifies it.⁶ For example, he writes (2010:225) that “As Luke makes clear, the rich must divest themselves of their superfluous goods to care for the poor, or they cannot be disciples (Luke 14.33; 18.23)”. Thus, his notion of the proper use of wealth and possessions characterises affluent disciples as “human chequebooks” or

6 Hays argues (2010:24) that Luke advocates the renunciation of all of one’s wealth, “though that renunciation appears in a variety of forms determined by one’s vocation and wealth”. On the other hand, he agrees that Christ is not advocating complete divestiture of possessions in Luke 14:33.

“ATM machines for the poor”, which is degrading to both parties. I prefer instead the concept of “stewardship”; and, interestingly, Hays (2010:26) agrees that “Jewish literature pervasively affirms that human ownership, regardless of the proximate means of acquisition, derives from divine ownership”.⁷ If so, since the English word “renounce” means “to formally declare one’s abandonment (of a claim, right or possession)”, it would seem irrational to demand or even expect a true disciple (or good steward) to abandon any possession that Yahweh has given him or her to look after. On that basis, we are left with no other choice than to assume that, in Luke 14:33, Christ was speaking metaphorically, as Coleman (2020:3–4) suggests:

A second approach to resolving the tension between renunciation and stewardship as the formative factors in Luke’s theology of wealth and possessions is to read the two strands of commands as serving different functions within Lukan thought. The calls to stewardship are understood in a literal way, as the essential and universally applicable norm for a Christian response to wealth, *while the renunciation commands are read as metaphorical* (emphasis added).⁸

Interestingly, we find a later example of this kind of metaphorical language in 1 Corinthians 7:29, when the apostle Paul writes that “the appointed time has been winding down and it has grown very short. From now on, *let even those who have wives be as if they had none*” (emphasis added). Obviously, no-one would suggest that Paul is advocating that husbands “dump” their wives; merely that they need to think and act like they are single in their devotion to Christ and His work, so that marital pressures are not allowed to hinder their calling in any way.

In the end, whatever way “the proper use of wealth and possessions” is interpreted in Luke-Acts, it is worth noting that, in Christ’s parable of the entrusted money, for instance, there is an expectation by the ‘master’ that His ‘good and faithful’ stewards will use the money they have been entrusted with in a profitable way. As I have argued extensively in this treatise, one way this can be accomplished in a productive manner is through wealth *creation*; and more effectively so if Yahweh’s “surplus of prosperity” is pooled and managed by a cadre of “men [and women] of good *and* attested character *and* repute, full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom”, who understand that it is their calling ‘to serve at the banking-tables’.

7 See Leviticus 25:23–24; Deuteronomy 8:17–18, 26:10; 1 Chronicles 29:12 and Ecclesiastes 5:19. Also, Philo explains that God merely loans earthly goods to humans for their use (Philo, *De Cherubim*, 108–109, 117; *De Vita Mosis*, 1.156; in Goodenough (1962:130).

8 However, she questions “whether the text of Luke-Acts itself supports the bifurcation of the two sets of Lukan instructions into literal and metaphorical categories”.

Luke: Historian or Theologian?

The art of ancient historiography, biblical or otherwise, falls somewhere between von Rad's 'history' and Barr's 'story' as the culmination of a process of imbuing factual data with significance for the manufacture of truth.¹

ROTHSCHILD, 2004:11

[The author of Luke-Acts]² aims not so much at letting the readers know what really happened as at helping them understand what all this means, this invasion of the Hellenistic world by the Christian church.

DIBELIUS, 1956:133

A2.1 An Overview of the Debate

The biblical scholar, Kirsopp Lake, is reported as saying to a class that, "if Acts is not a sound historical document, we know nothing of the origins of Christianity".³ Nevertheless, the scholarly debate concerning whether to treat Luke as either "The First Christian Historian" (Dibelius, 1956:133) or a theologian who "historicized" his message (van Unnik, 1976:25) has been raging since the mid-nineteenth century, when members of the Tübingen school started to challenge the historical authenticity and accuracy of Acts.⁴

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- 1 See Gerhard von Rad (1966:166–204); also, James Barr (1976:6). I owe a particular debt here to Sterling (1992) and Rothschild (2004) who chose the debate surrounding the historicity of Luke-Acts as the subject of their doctoral dissertations. For further reading, see specifically Rothschild (2004:24–59); also Keck and Martyn (1976); in particular, the chapters by van Unnik (pp. 15–32), Goodenough (pp. 51–59), Klijn (pp. 103–110) and Haenchen (pp. 258–278).
 - 2 According to Sterling (1992:321), "The third Gospel and the book of Acts are both anonymous [...] It is not until the latter half of the second century that we have any testimony about the authorship of Luke-Acts". Nevertheless, Talbert (1997:1) informs us that "The early tradition speaks of Luke as the author: for example, the Muratorian Canon; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.14.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 5.12; Eusebius, *Church History* 3.4; Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 3.6, *Epistle* 53.9; *Lives of Illustrious Men* 7". Consequently, I have accepted the presupposition that a single author wrote both works, and have no problem in recognising that author as Luke.
 - 3 Cited in Goodenough (1976:51).
 - 4 van Unnik (1976:15) refers to Acts as a "Storm Center in Contemporary Scholarship". According to Horton Harris (1975:255; cited in Barrett, 1996:52), the chief characteristic of the Tübingen school was "their objection to the supernatural", which constituted "the first comprehensive

The arguments against Luke writing “pure history” (Moxnes, 1993:250) are many.⁵ The presence of a “high frequency of supernatural and miraculous events [and] confessional language” is said to put him squarely in the theologian camp.⁶ Other critics point to the amount of hyperbole in Acts (e.g. “fanciful” numbers and the reputed exaggeration of both sizes of audience and the importance of eyewitnesses and/or protagonists); also, the presence of “historical errors”, as well as various accounts of events that look “implausible”, along with certain “inconsistencies” in Luke’s reports concerning Paul (when compared to Paul’s own account of the same event in his epistles) – not to mention particular problems associated with the various speeches.⁷

On the other side of the debate, the promoters of “Luke as historian” argue that the historicists have judged Luke wrongly, as a result of their “rather narrow understandings of ancient historiography” (Rothschild, 2004:24). They accuse the historicists of going too far in trying to reduce history to facts and facts alone; and, as a result, anything that cannot be categorised as factual has been relegated to theology, ideology and literary licence – or worse, myth. Consequently, Luke is viewed as *either* historian *or* theologian; a hybrid status is rarely countenanced.⁸ The crux of the dilemma is explained succinctly by Watson (1996:2): “For the very early history of the Christian Church from just after the death of Jesus the only direct evidence we have is in the Book of Acts. How far the history is authentic is not easy to judge, but it does represent the Christian tradition or, at least, the only strand of it we know”.

To start, it would be helpful to discuss the generally accepted theory as to *why* Luke wrote Luke-Acts. At the time the work was written (between 75 and 90 CE),⁹ the Christian church faced serious credibility problems, both from within and without. As

[...] attempt to interpret the New Testament and the history of the early Church from a non-supernatural (indeed anti-supernatural) and non-miraculous standpoint”.

- 5 According to Green (1996:285–286), “Acts has too often and unfortunately continues in some quarters to be evaluated as historiography on the basis of modernist, positivistic canons [...] criteria that have themselves become problematic”.
- 6 Rothschild (2004:8) defines “religious confession” in the pejorative sense as “a relaxation of critical reasoning and succumbing to the theocentric climate of the day”.
- 7 I am not concerned here with the so-called “we-passages” in Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16, which fall outside the focus of this investigation.
- 8 A hybrid designation of sorts is suggested by Klaus Berger (1984:359–360), who describes Acts as “apologetic history”, which Sterling (1992:320) contends is “in the style of Josephos”. Sterling (1992:17) also offers a helpful explanation of the kind of “apologetic historiography” found in Acts: i.e. “the story of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group which follows the group’s own traditions but Hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world”.
- 9 According to van Unnik (1976:19), “There is a fairly strong consensus that [Luke] wrote after the fall of Jerusalem to which he refers in Luke 21:20ff” Sterling (1992:329–330) notes that

van Unnik (1976:24–25) explains, “By the time Luke wrote, the expectation of an imminent return of Christ [the *parousia*] had been proven wrong by the turn of events”. Thus, people began to wonder whether the entire message of Christ might be wrong, which obviously created a crisis among the Christian communities of that time.¹⁰ Rothschild (2004:91) writes that, “By the end of the first century, legends surrounding Christian origins had multiplied so rapidly that the entire debate was mired in complexity and doubt”. And, as an example of how the Romans viewed the situation, she cites Pliny’s description of the early Jewish Christian movement as “nothing more than a degenerate and extravagant superstition”.¹¹

It is against this background that Luke chose to write Luke-Acts, so that not just the “most excellent Theophilus”, but also the followers of Jesus everywhere, “may know the full truth and understand with certainty and security against error the accounts (histories) and doctrines of faith which [they had] been informed *and* in which [they had] been orally instructed” (Luke 1:4). Equally as important perhaps is that Luke did so “after having searched out diligently and followed all things closely and traced accurately the course from the highest to the minutest detail from the very first, to write an orderly account” (Luke 1:3). In other words, as Rothschild remarks (2004:94), Luke “claims that his investigation has been thorough [...] and has produced a *plausible* version of the events” (emphasis added).¹² Nevertheless, along with his fellow ancient historians, Luke is believed to understand that facts alone will not convince his educated audience;¹³ consequently, like his contemporaries, he is said to employ what Rothschild (2004:2004:3) describes as “techniques of persuasion”.¹⁴ However, any

“the third gospel uses the gospel of Mark, which was composed c. 65–75 AD”, and so tightens the date/s of writing Luke-Acts to “between 80–90 AD”.

10 Rothschild (2004:41) calls it a “theological dilemma”.

11 See Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.96.8, written while he was imperial governor of Bithynia-Pontus. His opinion is shared by Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) who, in his account of Christian persecution under Nero, describes the sect as practitioners of an *exitiabilis superstitio*; likewise, Seutonius (in *Nero* 6.16.2) refers to Christians as *genus hominum superstitionis novae*.

12 Rothschild (2004:94, n.122) explains that “ἀσφάλεια in Luke 1:4 can incorporate the ideals of impartiality and plausibility”. In Strong’s Concordance, *asphaleia* is defined as ‘certainty, undoubted truth’; from the root *asphalēs*, ‘firm (that which can be relied on), certain, true’. According to Green (1996:285), Luke was something of a pioneer and faced a major hurdle in the writing of Acts: “It was unheard of in antiquity to write the history of a religious movement, since history was political history, dealing with significant events”; and so, “a newly formed sect was no suitable subject for a historian”.

13 As mentioned previously, Dibelius (1956:53) calls them “a higher circle of readers”.

14 Rothschild is using Aristotle’s definition of “rhetoric” (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1): i.e. ‘available means of persuasion’. However, she contends (2004:291) that such techniques “do not undermine

possible use of these techniques should not be confused with the view mentioned by van Unnik (1976:27) that, as an “historian in antiquity [Luke allowed] himself certain liberties”: i.e. creative or literary licence.

A2.2 Techniques of Persuasion?

Moxnes (1993:250) concedes that “Luke does not write ‘pure’ history”, but argues that, “In line with the tradition of his time, there was no conflict between the ideal of true historical rendering and of telling the story with the purpose of influencing one’s readers”.¹⁵ Consequently, if Luke did use any ancient “techniques of persuasion”, it would not diminish his credibility as an historian; rather it would enhance it – within the context of ancient historiographic practices.¹⁶ Therefore, it would be helpful to discuss some of these alleged techniques and, in doing so, illustrate how an economic perspective (when used as an exegetical tool) adds to the credibility of Luke’s version of events – and thus provides a worthwhile contribution to the Luke-Acts debate.

First among the arguments *contra* Luke as historian (and *pro* Luke as theologian) is the presence of a “high frequency of supernatural and miraculous events” in his accounts, along with a considerable amount of “confessional language”. In response, Rothschild (2004:21) offers the example of Plutarch’s report that “Caesar prevaricates about going to the Senate on the Ides of March on the basis of omens”.¹⁷ She correctly reminds us that “Although theological in nature, appeals to omens represents an accurate depiction of a *bona fide* historical individual. Theology must, thus, be integrated into our understanding of the events at the core level of fact”. Similarly, Talbert (1997:3) contends that, “In antiquity it was widely believed that a divine necessity controlled human history, shaping the course of its events. Polybius, for example, believed a divine providence ruled the world. This belief he expounded in his *Histories*”.¹⁸

generic understandings of the work as historiography in favour of theological readings, rather they support the designation of Luke-Acts as Hellenist historiography”.

15 He is quoting David Aune (1987:77–115).

16 van Unnik (1979:37–60) argues that the preface, speeches and emphasis on autopsy demonstrate the ties of Acts to Hellenistic historiography, and considers Acts an historical work. Likewise, Sterling (1992:320) finds the arguments for locating Acts within the stream of historiography to be “persuasive”. Finally, Conzelmann (1987:x1) regards Acts as a “historical monograph”.

17 Plutarch, *Caesar* 63.3–67.1.

18 To these examples, we might also add Eusebius’ “historical account” of Constantine at the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 CE. In his *Life of Constantine*, Eusebius reports that Constantine looked up to the sun before the battle and saw a cross of light above it, accompanied by the Greek words Ἐν Τούτῳ Νίκα (‘by this, win!’). Following this “vision”,

Granted, the “miraculous” occupies a significant role within Luke-Acts; more so than in any of the other canonical gospels.¹⁹ However, since Acts is reputedly the historical account of the birth and early expansion of a religious movement whose central doctrine (as well as its credibility) depends on divine intervention in the human experience, this is only to be expected.²⁰ Rothschild (2004:91) further argues that “Jewish and Greek historiography alike emerge from literary contexts that make divine-human relationships explicit where such relationships are necessary for the truth”. However, truth in this case is more than mere fact; it is a kind of “higher truth” – one that is imbued with significance. For example, in his commentary on the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48), Dibelius (1956:122) writes that “Here as elsewhere Luke has abandoned an exact reproduction of history for the sake of a higher, historical truth”; namely, that “Incorporating Gentiles into the church without subjecting them to the law originated not with Paul, nor with Peter, but with God”.

The second issue/problem that historicists have with Luke-Acts is the author's reputed use of hyperbole; or, put bluntly, Luke's (supposed) exaggeration of either the number of people in attendance at key events or the importance of those involved: e.g. his frequent references to the social/religious elite as eyewitnesses or protagonists. As mentioned previously, the numbers given by Luke to describe various stages of primitive church growth (e.g. “3,000”, “5,000”, etc.) are usually disputed as overly-ambitious, if not fanciful, causing Lüdemann (1989:47), for example, to suggest that “The number 3000 comes from Luke's imagination”. Similarly, Rothschild (2004:277) contends that “it is *implausible* that [Peter's] brief sermon [at Pentecost] elicited wholesale commitment on the part of so many” (emphasis added). However, we may infer from the historical/economic context of the event that Peter's “brief sermon” tapped into a kind of psychological *tsunami* created by over eight centuries of Jewish theology and tradition, and driven by a powerful, emotional groundswell of hope and expectations of restoration in both the spiritual *and* economic life of the Jewish people. And since the sermon was delivered in 33 CE, during an empire-wide financial crisis, any offer of relief from the economic problems of the day would have every chance of eliciting “wholesale commitment from so many”. Thus, the economic context of the event helps

Constantine commanded his troops to adorn their shields with the *Chi-Rho*, and they were ultimately victorious.

19 Rothschild (2004:142) informs us that “Interest in divine intervention in Luke-Acts exceeds that of other canonical gospels”.

20 In a similar vein, in John 10:25, Jesus cites the evidence of miracles in His ministry in order to authenticate His authority: “The very works that I do by the power of My Father and in My Father's Name bear witness to Me – they are My credentials and evidence in support of Me”.

to make the seemingly implausible become eminently plausible. Furthermore, as I have argued previously, it is also plausible that the (supposedly) extraordinary congregation numbers reported by Luke in subsequent chapters could indeed have occurred as a direct result of the economic growth and attendant prosperity produced by the activities of a bank (or “trapezitic business”) operating at the heart of the primitive church community.²¹

Apart from the congregational numbers claimed by Luke, he is also said to frequently exaggerate audience/eyewitness records by his use of “all”: e.g. “the high priest and *all* those with him” (Acts 5:17); also “*all* the elders from among Israel” (5:21). Likewise, in Acts 4:21, Luke suggests that the Council felt unable to punish Peter and John because they feared the reaction of the many people who witnessed the miracle of the healed cripple – since “*all* of them praised God for what had happened”.²² Another way that Luke uses “all” is to emphasise the high status of key participants in different events. For instance, in Acts 4:5–6, Luke stresses the importance of the Council members before whom Peter and John appeared, by documenting names and titles: “It happened on the next day their rulers, elders and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, and *all* those who were of high priestly descent”.

But then, if, as I contend, the apostles and (later) the Seven Hellenist *trapezitai* controlled a thriving banking operation in Jerusalem that would have been considered by many as a serious rival/threat to the corrupt Temple treasury-bank, the activities and pronouncements of the leaders of this new group with its cadre of controversial “priest-bankers” would undoubtedly have attracted both widespread and high level interest among the populace of Jerusalem – especially in the midst of an empire-wide economic crisis. A modern example of this unusual and seemingly inordinate level of interest can be seen in the attention given to the chairmen and chief executives of major banks (e.g. Goldman Sachs and J. P. Morgan in New York; and Barclays in the UK) during the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath: i.e. appearances before US Senate and UK Parliamentary committees; millions of “column inches” in newspapers, magazines and on websites; plus immeasurable airtime on all forms of broadcast media. So it would appear that these alleged problems with Luke’s credibility as an historian exist primarily because, once again, biblical scholars have failed to consider and/or understand the significance of the economic context of Acts with all of its ramifications.

²¹ See Chapter 10.9, *Speculations and conclusions*.

²² Both examples are cited in Rothschild (2004:269–270); emphasis added.

A2.3 Luke's Errors? Or Our Ignorance of the Context?

The third problem with Luke as historian is the reputed existence of historical errors in his text: e.g. Watson (1996:111) notes Luke's reference to Annas as high priest after he no longer held that position. Against this, as cited previously, Smallwood (1970:91) explains that "The high priesthood tended to be confined to a small group of families, and the current holder, together with ex-High Priests, were known collectively as 'the High Priests'". Thus, the only mistake here concerning Jewish history is on the part of Watson, not Luke.

Other sections of the text that look like possible errors can also be explained by use of an economic perspective. For instance, according to Rothschild (2004:278), "Acts 6 records the apostles' decision that they not 'neglect the word of God in order to serve tables' (v.2). Because Stephen and Philip immediately take up roles as 'ministers of the word' (v.4) following their appointment to serve tables, *the historical plausibility of the decision is vulnerable*" (emphasis added).²³ However, our knowledge of the day-to-day operations of ancient Hellenistic *trapezai* – in particular, the fact that senior bankers were usually *not* to be found "serving at tables"²⁴ – actually reinforces the historical plausibility of Luke's account.²⁵ To these alleged errors can be added certain problems of interpretation with portions of Luke's text that exegetes have thus far failed to resolve, often arising from the idealisation and/or over-spiritualisation of phrases or words that I contend describe or imply more mundane (i.e. everyday commercial) events. For example, Luke's statement that the primitive church had "all things in common" (Acts 2:44 & 4:32) has been described as an idealised depiction of the facts: e.g. events were embroidered or overstated for propaganda and/or fundraising purposes.

23 For the same reason, Johnson and Harrington (1992:111) and Esler (1987:141) also have "suspicions as to the accuracy" of Luke's account of the event.

24 See Chapter 3.3, *Beyond the tables*.

25 Another argument against historical authenticity focuses on the speeches in Acts. According to Watson (1996:34), "Greek and Roman authors habitually made up speeches": e.g. Lucian's advice to ancient speech writers is that, "If you have to introduce a character making a speech, let the content of it be, first, suitable to the speaker and the situation [...] though indeed you have the license to be rhetorical here and to demonstrate your stylistic ingenuity" (*On the Art of Writing History* 58, cited in Talbert, 1997:46). On that basis, it could be said that the speeches in fact verify Luke's status as a historian – *within the context of ancient historiographic practices*. In support, Sterling (1992:372) writes that "Speeches were a common trademark of Greek historiography". He further argues that the speeches of Acts (with the exception of the so-called missionary speeches) "stood in the line of Greek historiography". For more on the issue of the speeches in Luke-Acts, see Schweitzer (1976:208–216) and, concerning Stephen's speech in particular, Watson (1996:34–60).

However, if interpreted within a commercial context (taking into account the existence of a *trapeza* patronised by merchants and merchant-financiers participating/investing in *koinōniai*, the ancient equivalent of today's limited partnerships) then, once again, a "more mundane" explanation provides Luke's account with a degree of historical plausibility denied to any idealised interpretations.²⁶ Also, the existing exegetical angst over the so-called problem of the Hellenist widows (Acts 6:1) dissipates almost entirely when an economic perspective is applied to the text, because it then becomes evident that it was *not* (a) a "theological problem" (Horrell, 2000:138); (b) a "Gentile God-fearer table fellowship problem" (Esler, 1987:159), (c) a sign of a growing schism between the Hebrew and Hellenist factions (Baur, c.1850), or (d) because the two groups practiced different liturgies arising from their different languages (Hengel, 1983:14, 25–29). Instead, as argued previously, when viewed through the lens of ancient economic practices, the passage highlights nothing more than a competency or workload problem.²⁷

In addition, Luke's authenticity/accuracy is further disputed on the basis of certain "inconsistencies" between the depiction of Paul in Acts and the Paul we read about in his epistles (e.g. Watson, 1996:112; and Knox, 1976:284, 308). The issue here is simply this: what (and therefore who) do you use as the benchmark for accuracy – the account in Acts, or the rendering in Paul's epistles? Among other problems I have with Paul concerning some of his statements and underlying motivations, I am suspicious, for example, of his account of the Apostolic Council (as found in Galatians 2:1–10; *cf.* Acts 15) – which omits the important contribution of Barnabas, and also appears to usurp Peter's primacy concerning the apostolic ministry to the Gentiles. For this, and other reasons that lie outside the focus of this volume, I believe that any bias in favour of Paul's accounts (*cf.* the narrative of Acts) should be challenged.²⁸

Finally, in the view of the historicists, there is a seemingly insurmountable hurdle to overcome in any attempt to secure Luke's status/legacy as an historian; namely, if Barr's "story" is to be elevated to the status of von Rad's "history", we must move beyond "plausible" to "authentic". And one way to accomplish this is by subjecting "story" to the tyranny of dates. Put simply, a good story merely requires a beginning and an end; however, an authentic historical account demands both an acceptable (i.e. historically confirmable) start-date and end-date. And here again, an economic perspective (when

26 Likewise, Luke's claim in Acts 4:34–35 that there were "no 'needy' (*endēes*) among them". Here again, idealisation and/or over-spiritualisation has obscured the more plausible, albeit mundane explanation (See Chapter 8.3, *No needy person among them*).

27 See Chapter 3.1, *The problem of the Hellenist widows re-examined*.

28 Of interest, Joseph Lightfoot's commentary on Galatians (written in 1865) offers four examples where the so-called "inconsistencies" between Luke's account of the Apostolic Council in Acts 15 and Paul's account in Galatians 2 can be explained. These are discussed briefly by Barrett (1996:45–46), who writes that, according to Lightfoot, "The narratives are in fact harmonious".

used as an exegetical tool) can make a significant contribution to the debate. In terms of this study, a key start-date is 33 CE,²⁹ which coincides with a well-documented economic crisis throughout the Roman Empire, adding to the authenticity – and potency of the appeal – of Peter’s sermon. Thus, it is indeed plausible that “3,000 souls” responded to the enticing combination of spiritual *and* economic promises/solutions being held out to them.

As also argued previously, the post-Pentecost growth in intensity of the tension between the Sadducee elite and the leadership of the Jesus-Believer sect follows the same trajectory as the numerical growth (and implicit economic growth) of the community. But, eventually, the threat to the elite’s economic and political powerbase grew to the point where it could no longer be tolerated. And the rare opportunity for action (even illegal action, if necessary) afforded by the interregnum was too good to pass up – which provides an equally plausible end-date with Stephen’s persecution and execution: 36/37 CE.

A2.4 Conclusion

The question of whether Luke should be categorised as *either* historian *or* theologian is overly-simplistic. It would therefore be better to frame the question in terms of whether Luke is:

- a) an historian who, in the tradition of ancient historiography, has combined theological components within his historical account – for the benefit of an audience used to omens, visions and other examples of divine intervention – in order to imbue facts with meaning and thus communicate a “higher truth”; or
- b) a theologian who has “historicized” his message in an attempt to make it more attractive to his educated readers by sounding plausible?

As often happens, this kind of “big picture” question is best addressed by breaking it down into an amalgamation of smaller issues. For example, *if* we accept that Luke was writing in the tradition of ancient historiography, *then* his usage of the “supernatural” does not preclude him from being accepted as an historian. Secondly, *if* (for example) we appreciate the potential interest in (and antipathy towards) a banking operation that offered a viable, ethical alternative to the corrupt Temple treasury-bank in Jerusalem (during an empire-wide financial crisis), *then* Luke cannot be accused of using hyperbole, because the level of public interest generated in this kind of political and economic environment provides a credible explanation that Luke was not

29 See Chapter 3.5, *The time spent on ‘this business’*.

exaggerating either the numbers or the importance of the protagonists involved; therefore, he does not lose the right to claim that he is writing history.

Thirdly, *if* we ignore much of the traditional idealisation and over-spiritualisation of sections of the text of Acts, and accept “more mundane” interpretations where applicable, *then* there is also no need to be “suspicious of the accuracy” of Luke’s account of certain events – since, for example, the potency of the motivational and psychological forces inherent in the promise/fulfilment of economic restoration implicit in the Acts 2 to 8 narrative makes the need for any “literary techniques of persuasion” redundant. Finally, *if* Luke’s account can be supported by dates of contemporary secular historical events (as found in other, acceptable sources), *then* his rendering of events becomes eminently plausible; ergo, Luke’s version of events qualifies as “history”, rather than mere “story”.

Thus, after taking all the above into consideration – and also since I find most of the arguments of the “Luke as theologian” school to be unconvincing, and the rebuttals of their arguments, as per the examples given above, highly plausible – I find myself in agreement with Martin Dibelius: Luke deserves the title of “The First Christian Historian”.

A Survey of Spiritual and Economic ‘Outpourings’ in the Modern Era

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries [exhibited] periodic awakenings and recessions of revivalistic religion that tended to resemble the ups and down of the business cycle.

SYNAN, 1997:14

A3.1 The Methodology and Problems Encountered

If, as I have argued above, the primitive church community did indeed experience the kind of economic blessing/benefits promised in the OT salvation-restoration oracles, we are then left with an intriguing question. Was the outpouring of “grain, oil and new wine” intended purely as a one-off event, to help finance the launch of the Christian church at Pentecost? Or is it also meant to benefit later generations of the people of Yahweh? The methodology for determining the answer to these questions appears deceptively simple: just compare the dates of episodes or periods of spiritual renewal (i.e. “revival”) against the dates of economic cycles¹ in the modern era – over a substantial length of time (e.g. for longer than a century) – to see whether these spiritual events coincide with periods of “material blessing” or economic regeneration (i.e. periods of economic recovery or prosperity). However, in practice this has not proved to be as easy as it sounds.

Since we have access to copious historical accounts of spiritual phenomena and/or events, some of which reach as far back as the eighth century CE,² the spiritual

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- 1 According to van Duijn (1983:3), the phrase “economic cycles” has connotations of regularity and suggests a self-repeating type of fluctuation of fixed length and amplitude around some trend; features that do not occur in economic life. He therefore prefers to use the term “cyclical fluctuations”.
 - 2 For example, according to the entry in the Revival Library website, Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of England*, completed c.731 CE, which records the arrival and infancy of the Christian Church in Great Britain, “unashamedly includes many references to supernatural happenings, healings, visions and divine encounters”. See “Bede” at <http://www.revival-library.org/catalogues/pre1700/indexpre1700.html>; accessed on July 19th 2009.

renewal component of the survey appeared to offer an abundance of suitable data. Nevertheless, I soon discovered that there was no central resource/database or comprehensive timeline of “revival” activity in published form; and so, initially, information had to be gleaned rather painstakingly from a myriad of individual, scattered and frustratingly disparate sources. Fortunately, things improved in that area with the publication of Vinson Synan’s book, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, which contains a comprehensive timeline of spiritual outpourings, dating from 1517 to 2000, compiled by David Barrett (2001:415–452). In more recent times, the internet has also become a helpful source of material on this subject: e.g. a website entitled *The Revival Library*, which has provided extra data to augment the information in Barrett’s timeline and my own initial research.

Similarly, the research into economic cycles in the modern era produced its own peculiar set of problems, to the point where I was forced to reduce the focus of the survey to the period between 1782 and 1973. On the advice of Johann Millendorfer and his colleagues at STUDIA, I chose to work with a set of dates based on economic long waves originally identified in 1925 by Nikolai Kondratieff,³ a Russian economist who was Director of the Conjunction Institute in Moscow from 1920 to 1928.⁴ Kondratieff identified three full “long wave” economic cycles, lasting for 54 to 60 year periods, which provided data sets of 1782–1845, 1845–1892, and 1892–1948; and each cycle was subsequently sub-divided into a sequence of four phases of “prosperity”, “recession”, “depression” and “recovery”.⁵ Based on Kondratieff’s original work, van Duijn (1983) has been able to extrapolate additional phases of prosperity (1948–1966) and recession (1967–1973). And, even though this extra period represents just half of one complete cycle, because it consists of both a positive and a negative phase of economic activity, I felt confident that its inclusion in the survey would not skew the results in any significant way.

So-called “long wave” economic cycles are not immune to controversy; for example, Ball (2004:234) argues that “there is simply not a long enough historical record to permit the identification of such a long period cycle with any statistical conviction”. On

3 In the literature available in English, his name appears predominantly as Kondratieff, but also occasionally as Kondrat’ev, Kondratiev or Kondratyev.

4 For an instructive article on the work of Kondrat’ev and the political problems he faced at the Conjunction Institute, see Barnett (1995). In Continental Europe, the word “conjunction” is used rather than “economic cycles”. It comes from the Latin *coniungere*, and describes the interplay of movements that together make up the direction in which the economy is moving.

5 Kondratieff was essentially an agricultural economist, and referred to the different economic phases as “Spring” (Recovery), “Summer” (Prosperity), “Autumn” (Recession) and “Winter” (Depression); however, for the sake of clarity, I have chosen to use the standard terminology.

the other hand, van Duijn (1983:18) asserts that their lack of acceptance may often be the result of academic indifference, rather than any problems with the theory itself. Apparently, the earliest known work on the possible existence of long-term economic cycles by Hyde Clarke (1847) and Jevons (1884) was motivated by the occurrence of famine in 1793 and 1847. However, the seeming evenness and durability of economic growth experienced after World War II caused the study of economic long waves to fall out of fashion with many economists, whose intellectual hubris apparently created an atmosphere of denial concerning the possible reoccurrence of a depression;⁶ particularly in Britain and the United States.⁷ Also, there is a lack of consensus concerning the dates of Kondratieff's three long waves, for the basic reason that there are difficulties in fixing the precise dates of "turning points": e.g. when depression turned to recovery, or when prosperity turned to recession.⁸ Nevertheless, despite these issues, Kondratieff cycles represented the only credible source of economic long waves available.

In 1930, Kondratieff was arrested and deported to Siberia without trial;⁹ and, even though economic long wave dates have been extrapolated by others up until the present time, my decision to stop at 1973 was determined by two factors. Firstly,

6 Sorkin (2009:221) provides an excellent example of this hubris: In 2008, Ben Bernanke, chairman of the US Federal Reserve (and ex-Professor of Economics at Princeton University), was asked whether the financial crisis that year would lead to another Great Depression or just a prolonged slump, as experienced by Japan in the 1990s. Apparently, Bernanke startled his audience with the boast that "We've learned so much from the Great Depression and Japan that we won't have either".

7 Hence the reason why most of the more recent literature on "long waves" comes out of Continental Europe; in particular, Holland, where three major Dutch textbooks give the topic considerable attention: e.g. Delfgaauw (1973:169–171), Korteweg and Keesing (1978:139–139, 155–156), and Andriesson (1980:129–130); whereas, the equivalent US texts ignore it or treat it merely as a footnote, as in Samuelson (1980:241); or as a passing remark, as in Lipsey and Steiner (1981:537); all cited in van Duijn (1983:18).

8 For example, Schumpeter (1939: xvi, 448; ix, 647), who was instrumental in bringing Kondratieff's work to the attention of western academia in the 1930s, determined the overall dates for the three cycles as 1787 to 1948; also, his assignment of the dates for the four phases within each cycle (i.e. his choice of turning points) differs from those of van Duijn (1983:143).

9 According to van Duijn (1983:64–65), Kondratieff's work on long wave economic cycles predicted that the post-World War I economic downswing would be followed by an upswing, which disagreed with the official view held by the Soviet leaders who believed that The Great Depression, which commenced in 1929, signalled the total disintegration of the capitalist system. Kondratieff also recommended that Soviet economic policies and government financing options should be decided on the basis of the profits made by individual agricultural or industrial enterprises, a politically-dangerous view that clashed with Stalin's directive concerning centralised government control and the collectivization of farms. His economic theories were officially labelled "wrong and reactionary" and, sadly, the last mention of Kondratieff is merely a footnote from Solzhenitsyn (1974:50, n. 24) who simply reports that

Kondratieff's theories experienced a resurgence of interest during the economic crisis of 1973, and various interpretations of his work since then have produced not just a "Fourth Kondratieff" (cycle) but also a fifth and even a possible sixth. This variance in opinions and/or dates is not only puzzling but also created further problems to the point where using Kondratieff-style long waves after 1973 appeared unworkable. Also, since that time, his work and theories have been highjacked, to put it bluntly, by groups and individuals bent on exploiting them to push different theories of impending economic doom, often for overtly commercial reasons: e.g. to sell expensive subscriptions to investment newsletters.

Secondly, perhaps because of the growth of mass media and cheap airline travel, the data available for so-called spiritual or spiritually-inspired events from 1973 onwards seemed to be full of references to large-scale conferences (e.g. the 11th Pentecostal World Conference held in London in 1976) as opposed to spontaneous outbreaks of revival. Granted, these gatherings attracted delegates and/or visitors that regularly numbered between 20,000 and 50,000 "souls"; all of whom were vitally interested in the work of the Holy Spirit in some form. However, the question of how to determine whether there was an authentic outpouring of the Holy Spirit at these organised (i.e. man-made) events proved far too problematic. Consequently, for all the above reasons, 1973 again looked like a good end point for the survey.

Using the abovementioned sources, I was able to identify a total of 228 instances of a possible outpouring of the Holy Spirit or revival-like activity that occurred between 1781 and 1973, and the full list is available in the appendix section at the end of my original dissertation. However, for illustration purposes, I have reproduced below complete data from the "Prosperity" phase (1782–1815) of the First Kondratieff Cycle (1782–1845), as per van Duijn's calculations. Since the purpose of the survey was limited to a simple comparison of the dates of different spiritual events and economic cycles and their constituent phases, each data set consists of rather basic information: (a) start date; (b) end date; (c) leader of the revival work, if known; (d) country; and also (e) a brief explanatory comment, where appropriate.

the economist was sentenced to solitary confinement, where he became mentally ill and then died – at some unknown date.

TABLE 1 Spiritual activity during the Summer/Prosperity phase (1782 to 1815) of the First Kondratieff Cycle (1782 to 1845)

Start	End	Leader	Country	Comment
1782		Jonathan Edwards	Britain	Concerts of Prayer movement
1783		George Lisle	Jamaica	Native Baptist Church founded
1784	1808		United States	American Methodist movement
1785			Wales	Brynengan
1786			Wales	Trecastle
1787	1805		United States	‘Great Revival’ in Southern states
1788		Johann Sailer	Allgauer, Bavaria	Revival among Bavarian Catholics
1790			Britain	Religious Tract Society founded
1790		Jonathan Edwards	United States	Concerts of Prayer movement
1790			United States	Pennsylvania and Virginia
1791			Britain	Yorkshire
1791			Wales	Bala
1793	1834	William Carey	India	
1795			Britain	London Missionary Society founded
1796			Britain	Scottish missionary societies founded
1796		Hans Hauge	Norway	
1797	1805		United States	Second Great Awakening begins
1798	1803	William Bramwell	Britain	Nottingham, Wetherby
1798	1799		Canada	Nova Scotia
1798	1799		United States	New England
1799			Britain	Church Missionary Society founded
1800			Scotland	Lewis, Harris, Perthshire
1800		James McGready	United States	Camp-meeting revivals in Kentucky
1801		Barton Stone	United States	Cane Ridge, Kentucky
1803			Scotland	Breadalbane, Perthshire
1804			Britain	British & Foreign Bible Soc. Founded
1805			Wales	Aberystwyth

TABLE 1 Spiritual activity during the Summer/Prosperity phase (*cont.*)

Start	End	Leader	Country	Comment
1806			Britain	Revivalists secede from Methodism
1810			Britain	Camp Meeting Methodists formed
1810			Russia	Revival in Russian Orthodox Church
1810		Robert Haldane	Switzerland	Revival in France and Germany
1810		Christmas Evans	Wales	
1812			Britain	Primitive Methodists formed
1813			Russia	Russian Bible Society founded
1815	1818		United States	Northern states

The data was entered into a spreadsheet and then sorted by date. At that point, I reduced the total number of events from 228 to 223, having decided that the deleted events did not constitute an episode of authentic spiritual outpouring, as in the case of the conferences referred to above, as well as earlier instances where, for example, missionaries travelled around Britain to recruit workers for foreign mission fields: e.g. Hudson Taylor’s meetings during the depression of 1872–1883, when he recruited young people to join the China Inland Mission. Also, data involving substantial, ongoing periods of spiritual activity had to be re-classified when the particular period was of sufficient duration to overlap different economic phases: e.g. the revival in Finland that commenced in 1835 and lasted 15 years. On the basis of an 1835 start date alone, this event could be classified as falling within the Depression of 1825 to 1835; however, the duration of this activity meant that it took place predominantly within the Recovery and Prosperity phases of 1836–1845 and 1845–1866 respectively. Consequently, this and similar examples were re-classified where appropriate.

Furthermore, since Kondratieff’s theories were based on his observations of nineteenth-century price and value series in Britain, France and the United States, I decided to also recalculate the results in a way that might correlate more closely with the geographical parameters of Kondratieff’s original data sets – by stripping out the 71 “spiritual” events that occurred outside of the United States and European sector. Interestingly, the change in results was minimal (i.e. a difference of approximately 1.4%), as shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2 Results of survey comparing the coincidence of spiritual and economic ‘outpourings’ between 1781 and 1973

Data sources	Revivals during economic Upturns		Revivals during economic downturns		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
World-wide	174	78.03	49	21.97	223	100.00
USA + Europe	128	79.50	33	20.50	152	100.00

A3.2 A Discussion of the Results

Obviously, the 78.03 and/or 79.5 per cent results shown here can be considered conclusive, and provide sufficient evidence to argue that, between 1781 and 1973, the vast majority of surveyed episodes or periods of spiritual activity coincided with periods of economic regeneration and growth. In fact, based on this result, orthodox economists would say that, during this period, episodes of spiritual renewal and economic regeneration were “significantly correlated”. Therefore, from these results we find support for a positive answer to the question of whether there is a relationship/correlation between spiritual “revival” and economic regeneration (as portrayed/promised in the OT salvation-restoration oracles) during the modern era.

Nevertheless, there still remains the question of the residual 21.97 and/or 20.5 per cent of spiritual episodes or periods that apparently occurred during times of economic downturn; and I find that there is no simple answer here. It is possible that anomalies of localised economic blessing coincided with local spiritual revivals while the wider economy was experiencing either recession or depression, in the same way conceivably that our sample of modern Israeli farmers who observed the OT law of *shmita* were “blessed” while those around them were not, as discussed previously. After all, if our central thesis is correct, it is possible that such an anomaly occurred in the first century CE, since the repentant “remnant” (the primitive church) may have experienced both economic and spiritual transformation/regeneration, while the rest of the Palestinian economy (as part of the “wicked generation”) continued to suffer the ill effects of the economic crisis of 33 CE. In fact, this kind of anomaly would have undoubtedly increased the attractiveness of the nascent sect to potential converts, and simultaneously added to the tension between temple and sect.

Also, there may have been instances where, in the midst of a spiritual revival, Christians failed to exploit opportunities for economic growth – or, if they did, the results were short-term and so localized as to not make any significant impact, statistically speaking. However, we have no way of determining either possibility with any precision. Furthermore, one could argue that a spiritual event, such as the Pentecostal experience that occurred among C. T. Studd's African workers in 1925 (which fell within the recession of 1920–29), is not an example of true revival, but merely a small, isolated version of what old-time Pentecostals referred to as “a time of refreshing”. But then, I have no doubt that those African workers believed that they did indeed experience an authentic outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, devoid of any satisfactory explanation for such anomalies, we are forced to resort to the kind of equivocation often used by economists.

On the one hand, the results of this simple survey strongly suggest that, in the modern era, there has been and (we may speculate) continues to be a relationship between spiritual revival/renewal and economic regeneration – in accord with the OT salvation-restoration oracles. On that basis, evangelists and mission workers (plus other interested parties) should, firstly, expect it to happen; secondly, perhaps promise or even promote the fact that it will happen (as implicit in the example of Peter's sermon, when he made reference to the prophet Joel); and, thirdly, plan for it to happen by providing the appropriate financial services infrastructure to ensure that any material economic “blessing” is maximised not just for the benefit of the individual converts but also their local and/or regional church communities. On the other hand, the results of this survey also suggest that, during the modern era, Yahweh appears to have poured out His Spirit on certain groups and locations without any apparent (widespread and therefore noteworthy) attendant economic blessing. And, apart from the explanations given above, the only suggestion we may offer to account for this is the sovereignty of a deity who is not bound by human experience or conditions, which I am sure that some readers would find explanation enough.

Now, the ultimate question that remains unanswered by this survey, perhaps because it is unanswerable, is whether Yahweh *proactively* poured out economic prosperity in conjunction with spiritual revival, or whether His people *reactively* took advantage of the periodic/cyclical availability of man-made economic surplus in order to finance and promote successful evangelistic or missionary campaigns that resulted in large numbers of revival-style conversions. According to the prophets Joel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it was the former; however, if you asked a humanist or atheist economist, they would no doubt argue that it was the latter. Nevertheless, in the end, this survey was meant to do nothing more than explore the *possibility* that there is a correlation between economic regeneration and spiritual revival/renewal in the modern era; and, on that basis, I believe it has achieved its limited but important objective.

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Traditional exegesis divides scripture into two distinct economic models: the OT (Hebrew) model of blessing with a “surplus of prosperity”, and the NT (Christian) model of economic collectivism with “all things in common”. Using an economic perspective as an exegetical tool, the author demonstrates that this differentiation is an artificial construct. In particular, he argues that various NT Greek words and phrases in Acts, which have been rendered to describe acts of charity, should be reinterpreted to depict overtly commercial activities, including the possibility of a banking operation at the heart of the primitive church that posed a serious political and economic threat to the Jewish elite in first-century Jerusalem.

DOUGLAS HARRISON-MILLS, Ph.D. (2012), University of Birmingham (UK), is an investment banker and independent scholar. He has been publishing his innovative biblical research for many years using the internet platform of Ourfathers.biz, which included a regular ‘e-pistle’ sent to Christian business and political professionals around the world.

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